

CLASSICAL 1750-1825

HISTORICAL THEMES

The Industrial Revolution

New developments in the means of production led to increases in material goods and wealth. As production was centralized, urban society became more central to life in Europe and the Americas.

The philosophy of the Enlightenment

This world view placed an emphasis on the natural rights of people, and on the ability of humans to shape their own environment. Writers such as Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) and Voltaire (1694-1778) helped shape these ideals.

The political ideals of republican government

The Enlightenment's emphasis on the individual led to the elevation of the individual's role in political life. The idea of the social contract lay behind two of the most momentous events of the period, the American and French Revolutions.

MUSICAL CONTEXT

Art and "Nature"

- People's view of the nature of this world, and of their relationship to it, was undergoing fundamental change.
- Political theories saw people as free agents in the world, with a nature that, if not fundamentally good, was at least not fundamentally bad.
- The concept of "natural" became an important component in artistic thought.

The Social Role of Music

- Improved economic conditions -- fostered by better production methods -- yielded more goods and greater wealth.
- "The pursuit of happiness" was available to a broader class of society.
- Music began to be seen as "an innocent luxury".
- European composers reacted to increased demand for music.

The Concept of Nature in the Arts

- The "unnatural" and "artificial" gestures of Baroque painting and sculpture were replaced with "natural" ideals of simplicity and balance.
- Allegorical subjects in art and literature were cast aside in favor of "real" people and situations, and the genre of the novel was born.
- In music, simplicity, balance and an interest in real emotions were critical for the composer.

MUSICAL STYLE

The style of the Classical era is marked by many of these ideals, and it is reflected in a number of musical elements:

- Simpler textures: Homophonic textures (usually melody and accompaniment) became the standard. Contrapuntal texture was used sparingly, and for specific purposes.
- Simpler melodies: Classical melodies usually fall into even phrases, and often were organized into symmetrical "question and answer" structures. Many composers found inspiration in folk melodies.
- The piano: The piano, with its ability to produce gradations of dynamics, became the most important solo instrument for Classical composers.
- Simple, rational forms: Simple two- and three-part forms became the essential building blocks of all Classical forms, especially the Sonata Allegro form.

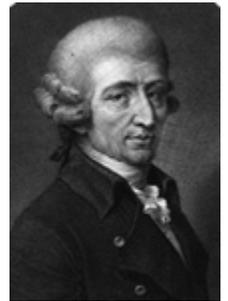
FRANZ JOSEPH HAYDN

Born: March 31, 1732. Rohrau, Austria

Died: May 31, 1809. Vienna, Austria

In his own words...

"My Prince was always satisfied with my works. I not only had the encouragement of constant approval but as conductor of an orchestra I could make experiments, observe what produced an effect and what weakened it, and... improve, alter, make additions, or omissions, and be as bold as I pleased."



WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

Born: January 27, 1756. Salzburg, Austria

Died: December 5, 1791. Vienna, Austria

In his own words...

"People make a mistake who think that my art has come easily to me. Nobody has devoted so much time and thought to composition as I. There is not a famous master whose music I have not studied over and over."



LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Born (baptized): December 17, 1770. Bonn, Germany

Died: March 26, 1827. Vienna, Austria

In his own words...

"I carry my thoughts about with me for a long time... before writing them down... once I have grasped a theme. I shall not forget it even years later. I change many things, discard others, and try again and again until I am satisfied; then, in my head... [the work] rises, it grows, I hear and see the image in front of me from every angle... and only the labor of writing it down remains... I turn my ideas into tones that resound, roar, and rage until at last they stand before me in the form of notes."

