

Western Art Music

The Development of the Symphony

A popular genre of the Baroque era was opera. Through the works of Monteverdi, an opera became a work consisting of recitatives, arias, duets and choruses. The orchestra was important and accompanied most parts of the opera. **Operas** would begin with an orchestral introduction called an overture or **sinfonia**. Messiah used a **French Overture**, (two sections: slow, fast.) **Italian Overtures** had three sections (fast, slow, fast.) The movements of a symphony are related to these.

Between 1750 and 1800 the lower middle classes rose in the spirit of democracy. The Classical Era is often referred to as the “Age of Reason” as many people were critical of the monarchy and established religions. They believed progress would be achieved through logic and reason, rather than blind faith and loyalty to tradition and custom. (These ideals are represented in music through calm, restrained and balanced proportions evident in much music of the time.)

Music was no longer just for the wealthy and the working classes demanded public concerts. This rise in **public concerts** led to professional musicians being hired to perform in concert halls. They performed the sinfonias of the Baroque era.

Composers saw the demand for **purely instrumental compositions** and began to write pieces for orchestra called sinfonias. These pieces were not related to opera. Pieces that introduced an opera or oratorio were referred to as overtures and these purely instrumental works became known as sinfonias / symphonies.

Early symphonies consisted of **three movements** (fast, slow, fast) and their instrumentation was similar to that of the Baroque orchestras. Strings dominated the orchestra with the possible addition of oboe, flute, horn and trumpet. Basso Continuo was still a part of the orchestra but declined during the Classical Era.

Composers of the early symphonies:

J.C. Bach and C.P.E. Bach. Bach’s sons bridged the gaps between Baroque and Classical periods. C.P.E. Bach used the three-movement structure and gave added importance to the first movement, which used an early sonata form.

Johann Stamitz worked at the Court of the Duke of Mannheim. During this time composers used more dynamic contrasts in their works. The orchestra at Mannheim used graduated dynamics, extended crescendos (steamroller effects) and unexpected fortes.

Vienna, Berlin and Mannheim were important locations for music at this time. The Mannheim orchestra became famous for its role in the development of the symphony. Its founder, Stamitz, was a prolific composer of symphonies. The orchestra was known for its virtuosity, size and innovative techniques.

Viennese **orchestras** of the time had approximately 35 players. In comparison, Mannheim was very large with its 20 violins, 4 violas, 4 celli, 4 double basses, 2 flutes, 2 oboes and 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 1 trumpet and 2 timpani. The winds were typically used to double or reinforce melody lines or to provide harmonic filling.

The Mannheim orchestra could achieve new dynamic ranges and tone colour. It became a model for composers all around Europe. Stamitz was one of the first composers to introduce a contrasting theme in the dominant. This theme was often lyrical and graceful in contrast with an energetic opening section.

The Classical Symphony became the most important new genre of the Classical Period. It embodied the new form – the Classical sonata form – and marked new developments in orchestration.

Franz Joseph Haydn exerted tremendous influence over the development of the symphony and is often called the “**Father of the Symphony**”. Although he did not invent it, he mastered the form through writing 104 symphonies. Some of his symphonies are monothematic (rather than having a second subject) and many start with a short **slow introduction**. His early works have three movements and still use the figured bass but gradually his symphonies take on these characteristics that typify Classical symphonies:

- The figured bass (basso continuo) is omitted
- The orchestra is grouped in families: strings, woodwind, brass and percussion
- A third movement is added between the slow and fast. (A minuet and trio)
- The forms and tempi of the movements are standardised.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart made the form a vehicle for his individuality and imagination, beautiful melodies and mastery of counterpoint. Many of his first movements consist of two contrasting themes. His (believed to be) 41 symphonies showed great sensitivity in orchestration, especially with the woodwind section.

1. What are the **origins** of the symphony? _____

2. How many **movements** in a symphony and what are the **typical forms** and **tempi** of each movement? _____

3. Complete the following table stating the number of symphonies written by each composer.

COMPOSER	LIFE SPAN (DATES)	NUMBER OF SYMPHONIES COMPOSED
Haydn		
Mozart		
Beethoven		