

DT501/1 History of Music: Classical/Romantic

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Lecture 10: Chamber Music (2)
Keyboard and Piano Music

The Evolution of the Piano to c.1800

- Early 18th century — dominant domestic keyboard instruments were either the harpsichord or the clavichord.
- c. 1700 — Bartolomeo Cristofori , ‘keeper of the instruments’ at the Medici court, invents the first successful piano whereby hammers strike the strings rather than pluck them. He termed it *gravicembalo col piano e forte* (‘harpsichord with loud and soft’).
- Cristofori’s pianos were lightly constructed, had small hammers made of soft leather pads and had a range of between four and four and a half octaves.
- After 1780 – the piano begins to overtake the harpsichord as the favoured keyboard instrument.
- Two prominent schools of piano making emerge towards the end of the 18th century.
 - the Viennese school: associated with Johann Andreas Stein, used by Mozart, light action, keys easy to depress, facilitated brilliant passagework.
 - the London school: associated with John Broadwood, heavier action, bigger, more robust sound.



Piano by Johann Andreas Stein



Broadwood Piano c. 1810



Square Piano c. 1786

The Market for Keyboard Music

- Composing for teaching purposes.
 - teaching pieces written by composers for private students, especially the daughters of wealthy families.
- Composing for publication.
 - a relatively new phenomenon in the 18th century which quickly took off as a result of the growing piano-owning middleclass market.
- Composing for performance both public and private.
 - the invention of the public concert in the mid to late 18th century.
 - the solo piano recital did not emerge until the mid-19th century. Solo works were performed alongside other works in mixed programmes.
 - private soirées: aristocratic families also hosted private concerts where composers would perform their latest sonatas or accompany other instrumentalists.

Mozart's Piano Sonatas



- Early sonatas influenced by the light galant melodic style of J. C. Bach as well as various other influences absorbed on his travels.
- Early sonatas comprise nos. 1–6 composed between 1774 and 1775.
- Nos. 7–9 date from his travels to Mannheim and Paris with no. 8 in A minor K. 310 being amongst the most striking he ever wrote.
- Nos. 10–18 composed in Vienna from 1782 and 1789.

Mozart's Piano Sonatas

- Piano Sonata in D major, K. 284, 1st movement
 - displays the influence on J. C. Bach in its use of short clearly articulated ideas and variety of textures.
 - in full sonata form as opposed to J. C. Bach's simpler binary form.
- Piano Sonata in F major, K. 332, 1st movement
 - displays the full range of Mozart's assimilation of different genres (singing style, learned style, hunting style, *Sturm und Drang*, galant style, chorale style).
- Slow Movements
 - display unmatched lyricism and poignancy.
 - usually in abridged sonata form (sonata form without development), later ones in fully-fledged sonata form.

Joseph Haydn Keyboard Works



- Keyboard works composed as teaching pieces or intended for talented intimates such as Mme Genzinger or Therese Jansen.
- While his early keyboard works were intended for harpsichord, clavichord or piano, after 1780 he composed exclusively for the piano.
- Like his other instrumental works Haydn's sonatas are notable for their motivic development, often using the same material for the beginning of the first and second subjects

Haydn Piano Sonata in C major Hob XVI:50

- One of Haydn's most technically difficult sonatas
 - composed for Therese Jansen, a talented pupil of Muzio Clementi whom Haydn met on his second visit to London in 1794.
- Demonstrates aspects of Haydn's mature style
 - monothematic: the initial idea generates most of the exposition's material.
 - developing variation: fusion of developing and variation techniques with the opening idea heard in five different guises (textural transformation, embellished, with the addition of new melodies in invertible counterpoint).
- Influenced by the London School of piano playing
 - sustain pedal markings in the development section where the music reaches the far-out point of A-flat.

Beethoven



- Regarded as the leading virtuoso in Vienna until deafness forced him to retire from public performance.
- Influenced by the virtuosic textures of the London School in their use of octaves, trills and elaborate left-hand patterns.
- Features of the piano music
 - dynamic forward motion, extremes of dynamics, texture and register.
 - development of small motivic cells.
 - unusual modulations particularly in the second subject area.

Beethoven's Piano Music

- Piano Sonata in C minor, Op. 13 (*Pathétique*)
 - begins with a slow fantasia-like introduction, more common in symphonies than piano sonatas. The sombre pacing and unexpected shifts generate a sombre, tragic mood.
 - the fast section announces the sonata exposition and has been associated with the theme of struggle, overcoming the tragedy of the opening.
 - in sonata form but a more expanded tonal plan than either Haydn or Mozart: second subject begins in e-flat minor and moves through D-flat major before settling into the expected key of E-flat major.
 - the form is dialectical: constant interaction between the opening 'tragic' material and the more dynamic material representing 'struggle'.

Improvisation and the Fantasia

- Unlike today improvisation was considered an indispensable skill of all true performing musicians.
- Accounts of pianistic contests frequently mention improvisation.
 - Mozart vs. Clementi
 - Beethoven vs. Steibelt
- Improvisation encompassed
 - ‘ex tempore’ performance on a given theme
 - embellishments
- For an idea of Mozart’s improvisation style
 - the written out cadenzas of the piano concertoes
 - his 4 keyboard fantasias
- Mozart’s Fantasia in C minor, K. 475
 - one of the most harmonically advanced works of the period.
 - proceeds from section to section by way of highly chromatic and unpredictable progressions.

Virtuosity and the London School



- Muzio Clementi (1752 —1832), Italian born pianist and composer.
 - although dismissed as a ‘mere mechanicus’ by Mozart after their 1781 contest, Clementi was an outstanding virtuoso.
 - famous for his passagework in thirds, sixths and octaves.
- Jan Ladislav Dussek (1760—1812) Czech pianist and composer.
 - pioneered piano textures which anticipate later Romantic writing with extended accompaniment patterns and much use of thirds, double thirds, octaves, fast scale passages etc.



Prescribed Listening

Joseph Haydn

Piano Sonata in C major, Hob XVI:50 (first movement)

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart,

Piano Sonata in A minor, K. 310 (first movement)

Ludwig van Beethoven

Piano Sonata in C minor, 'Pathétique', Op. 13 (first movement)

Prescribed Reading

David Rowland, 'The Music of the Early Pianists' in *The Cambridge Companion to the Piano*, pp. 135–150.

Read the descriptions of Mozart's Piano Sonata in F major K. 332 and Beethoven's 'Pathetique' Sonata in your Norton Anthology.

For improvisation and Mozart's Fantasia in C minor see, Taruskin, *Music in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, pp. 610–631.

For the history of the development of the piano and other related topics consult the *The Cambridge Companion to the Piano*.