

The Classical Era

Composers

Beethoven, Ludwig Van (1770-1827)

Of German descent, Ludwig Van Beethoven was born in 1770. It has been said that Beethoven and his music are the bridge between the Classical and the Romantic eras. Beethoven had a difficult childhood; he was often angry and frustrated, but he also had a wit and personal charm about him. He was self-educated and rose above his tribulations to become one of the greatest composers of all time. Beethoven's music experimented with new rhythms, and he composed music based on an idea, as opposed to a full rhythm. His works were composed for quartets, concertos, symphonies, and piano sonatas. To some, Beethoven is regarded as the father of modern music.

It is often said that Beethoven's music contained his own struggles for both political and personal freedom. His defiant plea for these freedoms can be heard somewhat in his Fifth Symphony, and wholeheartedly in his [Ninth Choral Symphony](#), and in his opera *Fidelio*. He put an extreme amount of emotion into all his works. Beethoven's music is recognized around the world. He composed nine symphonies and pieces such as [Für Elise](#), and [Moonlight Sonata](#)

The musical career of Beethoven can best be viewed in three different phases. In the first period of his musical career, he composed his First and Second Symphonies, Opus 18, six string quartets, and the first fifteen of his thirty two piano [sonatas](#). In the second or middle stage of his career, Beethoven began to build on Classical works, bringing them to a new level of expressiveness. In this stage he composed his Third Symphony, also known as [Eroica](#). This piece was both longer than his other two symphonies and was so dramatic and emotional that it would change the symphonic form as the musical world knew it. In his third and last stage, Beethoven was at his most creative, and he explored music further than he had ever done before. In his final piano sonatas and string [quartets](#), Beethoven abandoned traditional form, while still keeping his own original sound. It is said that his musical defiance is due in part to his deafness which isolated him from society.

Beethoven's music remembered today for its unique quality and for its defiance. His new styles bridged the Classical and Romantic era and brought the musical world from the old into the new. Beethoven was also the first composer to ever be appreciated by the public within his own lifetime. Thanks to him, great musicians of their time would receive the credit they were rightly due.

Gluck, Christoph Willibald (1714-1787)

Christoph Willibald Gluck was of Bavarian heritage and was a writer of the operatic form. Gluck spent ten years of his life in Italy, where although his operas were not highly acclaimed or noteworthy, they were successful. On one occasion, he played one of his Italian operas in London. It was not well received because Handel was the dominating composer of operas there. Handel commented behind his back "Gluck knows no more counterpoint than mine cook (Kaufmann, 55-56)."

Gluck eventually reformed his style and applied classic Greek principles to the Italian operatic form. His new operas showed growth and were full of drama, emotion, genuine orchestral accompaniment, powerful choruses, and dignified melodies and arias. By his fortieth birthday, Gluck had written twenty operas. Gluck wrote the now famous operas [Orfeo ed Euridice](#), *Alceste*, *Paris and Helen*, *Iphigenia in Aulis* and *Armide*. Gluck's new style was hailed as modern, innovative, and almost revolutionary. Christoph Willibald Gluck made the operatic composers of the era seem "old hat". One critic is quoted as saying, "If the Greeks had had a musician, they would have had Gluck (Kaufmann, 56)."

Haydn, Franz Joseph (1732-1809)

Austrian born and raised, Franz Joseph Haydn began his musical career as a choirboy in Vienna. While at school, scribbling music on paper became a favorite pastime of his. A man named Count Furnberg became the first patron of Haydn. Under the Count, Haydn played string quartets and composed his first eighteen quartets. He then went on to be a music director to the Count Morzin. At this time, he composed his Symphony No. 1, which was followed by over a hundred more. He then spent thirty years with the family of Prince Paul Anton Esterhazy. During those years, he composed five masses, forty string quartets, sixty symphonies, thirty clavier pieces, one hundred and five cello trios, and many different types of works for funerals, weddings, birthdays, and other celebrations. Symphonies No. 44 "[Allegro](#)", "[Allegretto](#)", "[Adagio](#)", "[Presto](#)", and No.104 [1st mvmt.](#), [2nd mvmt.](#), [3rd mvmt.](#), [4th mvmt.](#), are among his more popular works.

Some of Haydn's most famous pieces are the *Minuet of the Ox*, *the Rasierquartet*, *the Kaiserquartett*, [The Creation](#) and *The Seasons*. Furthermore, Franz Joseph Haydn is known as the father of the string quartet. Mozart has been quoted as saying, "From Papa Haydn I learned all I know about string quartets." He added extra instrumentation into the orchestra and sang his music with all his heart. Haydn is regarded today as one of the greatest composers in all of music history.

Mozart, Wolfgang Amadeus (1756-1791)

Austrian born, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was regarded to be the greatest child prodigy the world has ever known. At age four, he heard his older sister playing a harpsichord minuet. Mozart begged his father to let him try the piece, and by ear, he played the piece perfectly. Throughout his life, tragedy struck. He was one of the most talented composers ever to walk the face of the earth, yet he led a life filled with much unhappiness.

Upon traveling to Italy, Mozart fell in love with the Italian opera. One of his most famous peras is *The Escape from the Seraglio*, in which the heroine was named after his wife Constanze. Although many of the people in Vienna greatly praised this opera, Mozart's patron, Emperor Joseph, was not a fan of the style. Even though Mozart had his streaks of bad luck and his family was often in debt, his marriage to Costanze held many moments of happiness. On Sunday mornings, Haydn and two other musician friends from Vienna would show up at Mozart's residence and would play string quartets. Haydn is quoted as telling Mozart's father, "I declare to you upon my honor that I consider your son the greatest composer that I have ever heard (Kaufmann, 67)."

Mozart composed many operas of which his most loved are [The Marriage of Figaro](#), [Don Giovanni](#), and [Cosi Fan Tutte](#). His last opera, [The Magic Flute](#), has charm and intelligence, even though it was written when he was sick and depressed. Ironically, during the same year that he wrote his last opera, a stranger approached Mozart and asked him to write a Requiem Mass. Although the stranger's motives and identity were unclear, Motzart began writing the Requiem Mass that was requested. When it was half finished, Mozart's sickness took a turn for the worse, and he died. The Requiem Mass would be his last composition. When he died the piece included (including [Requiem Aeternam](#), [Kyrie Eleison](#), [Dies Irae](#), and [Confutatis](#), [Lacrimosa](#). Although he only lived to age 35, Mozart is regarded as a prominent musical genius.