

# The Classical Era

## (1750-1820 C.E.)

Although the Classical Era lasted for only 70 years, there was a substantial change in the music that was being produced. Classical music placed a greater stress on clarity with regard to melodic expression and instrumental color. Although opera and vocal music (both sacred and secular) were still being written, orchestral literature was performed on a much broader basis. The orchestra gained more color and flexibility as clarinets, flutes, oboes, and bassoons became permanent members of the orchestra.

The classical style was dominated by *homophony*, which consisted of a single melodic line and an accompaniment. New forms of composition were developed to adapt to this style. The most important of these forms was the *sonata* which was in instrumental music. This form continued to change and evolve throughout the classical period, and it is important to note that the classical sonata was very different from the sonatas written by Baroque composers.

The early 1700s reflected a musical style known as Rococo. This style served as a transition from the Baroque to the Classical Era. Rococo, which developed in France, is actually an art term that described a new art style which was both a light and embellished. Musically speaking, it is referred to as style galant. In Germany, after 1750, the style galant became empfindsamer stil. With this change in name came an added element of expressiveness and sentimentality.

As classical music evolved, distinctive characteristics developed. Changes in form were seen along with changes in phrase structure. Shorter phrases and well defined cadences became more prevalent. During this time period, a favorite accompaniment pattern was the Alberti bass (name for Domenico Alberti), which featured a broken chord progression.

The melodies of the Classical era were more compact and diatonic. Harmony was less structured. It used the tonic, dominant, and subdominant chords. In addition, during this period, diatonic harmony was more common than chromatic. Composers mainly used chords in triadic form and occasionally used seventh chords in their compositions.

The four major composers of the Classical era were Haydn, Mozart, Gluck, and Beethoven. These composers wrote extensively for vocal and instrumental mediums.