

The Classical Era

VOCAL

While the instrumental works of the Classical era were grandiose, the vocal works of the time did not make much of an evolution from those of the Baroque era. There are a few important key changes in concepts that occurred, however.

Opera

With the Classical Era came both the decay and subsequent reformation of the Italian opera seria, or serious opera. Its once dramatic and emotional presentation had evolved into a showy and artificial art form. Although many musicians of the time realized the tragic decline of the opera seria, change took place slowly. To try and restore the opera seria to its former greatness, composers made certain changes in their writing styles. While not everyone agreed upon or employed these changes, many of them can be found in some of the operas of the late 18th century. According to Hugh M. Miller, the following were some of the changes that occurred in opera during the 18th century:

1. Melodic recitatives with orchestral accompaniment were favored over *Secco* recitatives
2. Solo singers began to lose some of their autocratic domination over opera performance and ostentatious virtuosity was less evident
3. Choral ensembles were used on a much more frequent basis
4. There was a greater concern for the dramatic aspects of operas, as there had been in the past and less concern given to formal music aspects
5. The orchestra was no longer just used for accompaniment and expanded in size and nature
6. *Chansons* and arias were not the only structures used as composers made operas more dramatic by using different techniques
7. Rigid *da capo* arias appeared less frequently as they gave way to more diversified forms. (127)

During the same time, the comedic opera began developing. This type of opera was in sharp contrast to the opera seria. It catered more to the people who wanted to "revolt" against the more serious and dramatic opera.

Religious Music

For the most part, after Handel mastered the *oratorio*, it died out as a musical form. Few oratorios of consequence were composed after Handel. During the late 18th century, any oratorios that were still being performed appeared to be almost identical to operas. Some oratorios went so far as to be staged and acted while the performers wore costumes. It is also important to note that Haydn's oratorios during the Classical era closely resembled Handel's earlier oratorios.

Church music now resembled operatic music more than ever before. Almost all composers of church music during the Classical era also composed operatic music. *Masses* became operatic styled pieces of literature for the orchestra, the solo voice, and the chorus. Duets and arias even resembled operas; the only feature that distinguished them from opera was their texts.

During the Classical era, some Baroque characteristics still remained in place in *sacred music*. Fugue choruses and *basso continuo* parts remained virtually identical to those in the Baroque era.