



A-R Online Music Anthology

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Content Guide The Classical Era, Part 1: 1750–1780

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Assigned Readings

[Core Survey](#)

[Historical and Analytical Perspectives](#)

[Composer Biographies](#)

Summary List

[Genres to Understand](#)

[Musical Terms to Understand](#)

[Names and Works to Remember](#)

[Main Concepts](#)

Scores and Recordings (See Names and Works to Remember)

Exercises

Content Guide

The Classical Era, Part 1: 1750–1780

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Assigned Readings

Core Survey

- [Robert Pearson, “Music in the Classical Era”](#)
Focus on the following sections:
 - Introduction: What is Classical about Classical Music?
 - Main Features of the Classical Era
 - Musical Style as Political Stance
 - New Attitudes toward Opera
 - The Galant Style
- [Matthew Pilcher, “Classical Genres and Forms”](#)
Focus on the following sections
 - Introduction
 - Domestic Music-Making—Music for Musicians
 - Music in the Theatre
 - Classical Forms

Historical and Analytical Perspectives

- [Markus Neuwirth, “Key Concepts for Theory of Music from the Classical Period”](#)
Focus on the following sections:
 - Musical Form and Cadential Punctuation
 - Koch’s Punctuation Theory and its Blind Spots: The Case of Haydn’s Sonata Hob. XVI:37
 - The Challenge of Determining Structural Closure: The Case of Mozart’s Violin Sonata K. 403
- [Kimary Fick, “Kenner, Liebhaber, and the Rise of the Musical Amateur: C. P. E. Bach’s Fantasia in C Minor”](#)
- [Jonathan Shold, “Symphony No. 25 in G Minor, K. 183 \(Commentary\)”](#)
- [Sophie Benn and Emily Laurance, “Pergolesi: *La serva padrona* \(Commentary\)”](#)
- [Danielle Bastone Barrettara, “Mozart: *Idomeneo*, K. 366, Overture and Act 1, scene 1 \(Commentary\)”](#)

Composer Biographies

- [Brian Proksch, “Joseph Haydn”](#)
- [Julian Rushton, “Wolfgang Amadé Mozart”](#)

Summary List

Genres to understand

- Fantasia
- Accompanied sonata
- Sonata
- Violin sonata
- Symphony
- Opera (buffa/seria)

Musical terms to understand

- Aria
- Binary form
- Cadence
- Closure
- Development
- Fantasia
- First subject group
- Period
- Phrase
- Recapitulation
- Recitative
- Rounded binary form
- Sonata form
- Second subject group
- Structural closure
- *Sturm und Drang*
- Ternary form
- Thematic working
(*thematische Arbeit*)

Names and works to remember

- C.P.E. Bach (1738–1768)
 - [Fantasia in C Minor](#) (ca. 1760);
 - [Recording](#)
- W.A. Mozart (1756–1791)
 - [Symphony No. 25 in G Minor, K. 183](#) (1773)
 - [Recording](#)
 - [Violin Sonata, K. 403](#) (1782–84)
 - [Recording](#)
- F.J. Haydn (1732–1809)
 - [Sonata, Hob. XVI:37](#) (ca.1780)
 - [Recording](#)
 - [String Quartet, Op. 20, no. 2](#) (1772)
 - [Recording](#)
 - [String Quartet in B-flat major, Op. 1, no. 1](#) (1757)
 - [Video recording](#)
- G. Pergolesi
 - [La serva padrona](#) (1733)
 - [A-R excerpts](#)
 - [Full video recording](#)
- C. W. Gluck (1756–1787)
 - [Orfeo ed Euridice](#) (1762)
 - [A-R excerpts](#)
 - [Video recording](#)
- J. P. Rameau (1683-1764)
 - [Le devin du village](#) (1752)
 - [Recording](#)

Main Concepts

- *Galant* style: what it is and why it was popular
- *Sturm und Drang/Empfindsamkeit* and how it is defined (in contrast to the *galant*)
- How composers played with conventions, even in seemingly conventional pieces
- How opera developed to take in more real-life situations, characters, and actions
- How so-called “Classical” music could embody traits that we now consider “Romantic”

Exercises ([click here for key](#))

1. Identify *galant* elements in Pergolesi's *La serva padrona* (you may refer to plot and characterization as well as musical style and form) and discuss what the opera was reacting to and why it was so popular in its day.
2. Write a brief harmonic analysis of the first movement of Haydn's Sonata Hob. XVI:37, accounting for Haydn's use and manipulation of cadences in particular.
3. Why can it be difficult to determine "structural closure" in this music? In your answer please refer to Mozart's Violin Sonata K. 403. (See [Markus Neuwirth, "Key Concepts for Theory of Music from the Classical Period,"](#) under the subheads "Musical Form and Cadential Punctuation" and "The Challenge of Determining Structural Closure: The Case of Mozart's Violin Sonata K. 403.")
4. Discuss the concept of *Sturm und Drang*, referring to Mozart's Symphony No. 25 in G Minor, K. 183. How helpful is this term in allowing you to characterize the music? Are there any limitations? Can you find a further example of *Sturm und Drang* in Classical era music?
5. C. P. E. Bach noted in his 1753 keyboard treatise that the free fantasia requires sensitive and sympathetic performance. With reference to the Fantasia in C Minor, discuss which aspects he might have had in mind and try to relate this to the concept of the fantasia in the Classical era.

Key to Exercises

- 1. Identify *galant* elements in Pergolesi’s *La serva padrona* (you may refer to plot and characterization as well as musical style and form) and discuss what the opera was reacting to and why it was so popular in its day.**

Musical elements to consider include simple, singable (and memorable) melodies; frequent repetition of musical ideas, with little elaborate ornamentation; and simple, homophonic textures. Plot elements to consider include the sympathy-grabbing ‘poverina’ [poor girl] figure (Serpina); the “rags to riches” story, which was so popular with audiences of the time (compare also Rosina from the *Barber of Seville*, who becomes Countess Almaviva Mozart and Da Ponte’s *The Marriage of Figaro*), and in general the language of the sentimental novel of the time, involving frequent appeals to the emotions and the familial, and the “everyday” happening. All of this was designed to contrast with the “gods and heroes” narratives, the unbelievable and other-worldly events of opera seria, and the stylized interchange of recitative and aria and highly ornamented vocal display.

- 2. Write a brief harmonic analysis of the first movement of Haydn’s Sonata Hob. XVI:37, accounting for Haydn’s use and manipulation of cadences in particular.**

Mm. 1–8 present the first subject in the tonic key of D major, ending with a perfect cadence. The next eight-measure phrase presents new material (not what is expected of a conventional “bridge” passage) in D major, ending with an imperfect cadence. This is not so much a cadence, though, as a dominant arrival. The second subject then follows in mm. 17–35, in the dominant, prefiguring the Neapolitan area, in m. 30, before the perfect cadence in m. 40. The development section explores a wide range of keys, revisiting the Neapolitan in m. 55, and arriving on the dominant seventh of D major. The coda in the recapitulation of the second subject also explores destabilizing harmonies: a chromatic chord on the flattened submediant in m. 93 and a supertonic chromatic ninth in m. 95 (not what is expected of a conventional “coda”). Ultimately, we hear a perfect authentic cadence in mm. 97–98. A true coda follows in mm. 98–103, stabilizing the discourse through the reiteration of tonic and dominant harmonies.

See chart below.

Section/Measures	Key	Theme group	Harmony
1–8	D major (tonic)	First	Ends with perfect cadence
9–16	D major	Bridge	Ends with imperfect cadence
17–35	A major (dominant)	Second	Neapolitan in m. 30; ends with perfect cadence
34–40	A major	Coda	Ends with a perfect cadence in A major
41–60	Various, starting in A major	Various, starting with the first	Neapolitan 6th (m. 55) and supertonic, chromatic seventh and tonic of B minor (mm. 56–57); ends with dominant seventh in D major (home tonic)
61–74	D major	First (extended and elaborated)	Ends with perfect cadence
74–79	Begins in D major; ends in A major	Bridge	Ends with perfect cadence in A major
80–98	D major	Second	Modulates to A major (m. 84), returns to D major (m. 86), leading to coda with chromatic flattened sub-median (m. 93), supertonic chromatic ninth (m. 95) and perfect cadence (mm. 97–98).

3. Why can it be difficult to determine “structural closure” in this music? In your answer please refer to Mozart’s Violin Sonata K. 403. (See [Markus Neuwirth, “Key Concepts for Theory of Music from the Classical Period,”](#) under the subheads “Musical Form and Cadential Punctuation” and “The Challenge of Determining Structural Closure: The Case of Mozart’s Violin Sonata K. 403.”)

Both the varied phrase construction and the pervasive playing with phrase-level conventions in the Classical era can make it difficult to determine where, conclusively, a

phrase, section, or work achieves closure. The Haydn movement in Question 2 includes just one instance of a perfect authentic cadence, for example. The opening of Mozart's Violin Sonata K. 403 challenges the analyst to decide which of several cadence candidates signifies genuine closure. In this way, both movements manipulate the conventions of closure, but in opposite ways. In the opening movement of K. 403, measures 1–4 end with a perfect authentic cadence, but mm. 5–8 end with a half cadence. A double suspension helps to create drive to the dominant here, so that the phrase serves as a transition.

- 4. Discuss the concept of *Sturm und Drang*, referring to Mozart's Symphony No. 25 in G Minor, K. 183. How helpful is this term in allowing you to characterize the music? Are there any limitations? Can you find a further example of *Sturm und Drang* in Classical era music?**

The term *Sturm und Drang* [storm and stress] refers to a German literary movement of the mid-eighteenth century. In music, *Sturm und Drang* elements supposedly include minor mode, destabilizing dynamic shifts, diminished chords and other destabilizing harmonies, tremolo, syncopation, and disjunct melodic contours. Of course, these elements may not relate to the *Sturm und Drang* in literature, but to a more generalized topic found in music of the time that evokes instability, mystery, the oracular, or the sublime. Mozart might have been influenced by Haydn's Symphony No. 45 in F-sharp Minor ("Farewell") when composing this work (1772), or indeed by chamber music such as Haydn's String Quartet in D minor, op. 9, no. 4 (ca. 1769).

- 5. C. P. E. Bach noted in his 1753 keyboard treatise that the free fantasia requires sensitive and sympathetic performance. With reference to the Fantasia in C Minor, discuss which aspects he might have had in mind and try to relate this to the concept of the fantasia in the Classical era.**

Empfindsamkeit was a movement in German literature and arts related to the midcentury cult of sensibility that pervaded literary Europe. Authors and artists in this movement sought to persuade by inciting sympathy and emotive responses in the reader, listener, or viewer. Tears of gentle melancholy, for example, were a characteristic reaction to such works. In music, such aspects as delicate, improvisatory ornamentation of lyrical lines; slow tempo; written out sighs; and special effects such as *Bebung* (finger vibrato, possible on a clavichord) have been connected to this style. All of these features led to difficulties of performance and of musical narratives that are formally trickier to follow than a dance form, sonata form, or set of variations. In this sense, Bach's fantasia and other music in the *empfindsamer Stil* were more for the Kenner (connoisseur) than for the Liebhaber (amateur).