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## Content Guide The Classical Era, Part 2: 1780–1820

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by [Nancy November](#)  
The University of Auckland

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# Content Guide

## The Classical Era, Part 1: 1750–1780

[Nancy November](#), The University of Auckland

### Assigned Readings

#### **Core Survey**

- [Robert Pearson, “Music in the Classical Era”](#)  
Focus on the following sections:
  - Bold Changes in Character
  - Expression as the Chief Purpose of Music
  - Form in Classical-Era Music
  - Conclusion
- [Matthew Pilcher, “Classical Genres and Forms”](#)  
Focus on the following sections
  - The Emergence of the Concert Hall: Music for Listeners
  - Music in the Church
- Kendra Preston Leonard, [“Women in Western Art Music”](#)  
Focus on Classical (1750–1820)

#### **Analytical Perspectives**

- [Robin Elliot: Beethoven: “String Quartet, Op. 18, no. 4 \(Commentary\)”](#)
- [Danielle Bastone Baurrettara, “Mozart: \*Don Giovanni\*, K. 527, Overture \(Commentary\)”](#)
- Danielle Bastone Barrettara, Commentaries on Mozart’s *Don Giovanni*, K. 527:
  - [Overture](#)
  - [Act 1, scenes 1, 2, and 3](#)
  - [Act 1, scenes 4 and 5](#)
  - [Act 1, scene 13](#)
  - [Act 1, scene 16](#)
  - [Act 1, scene 17](#)
  - [Act 2, scene 7](#)
- [Jeremy Leong, “Mozart’s \*Don Giovanni\*”](#)
- [Bryan Proksch, “Haydn: String Quartet Op. 33, no. 2, “The Joke” \(Commentary\)”](#)
- [Jonathan Shold, “Beethoven: Symphony no. 3, Op. 55, “Eroica” \(Commentary\)”](#)

#### **Composer Biographies**

- [Nancy November, “Ludwig van Beethoven”](#)
- [Brian Proksch, “Joseph Haydn”](#)
- [Julian Rushton, “Wolfgang Amadé Mozart”](#)

## Summary List

### *Genres to understand*

- Concerto
- Opera (buffa/seria)
- Oratorio
- Piano sonata
- String quartet
- Symphony

### *Musical terms to understand*

- Concertante
- Counterpoint
- Retransition
- Ritornello
- Rondo
- Scherzo
- Topic
- Variation

### *Names and works to remember*

- Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)
  - [String Quartet, Op. 18, no. 4](#) (1801)
    - [Recording](#)
  - [String Quartets, Op. 59](#) (1806)
    - [Recording](#)
  - *Sinfonia Eroica*, Op. 55 (1803)
    - [Mvt. 1](#) (A-R score)
      - [Recording](#)
    - [Mvt. 2](#) (A-R score)
      - [Recording](#)
    - [Mvt. 3](#) (IMSLP link)
      - [Recording](#)
    - [Mvt. 4](#) (IMSLP link)
      - [Recording](#)
  - [Piano Sonata in F Minor, Op. 57, “Appassionata”](#) (1806)
    - [Recording](#)
  - *Fidelio*, Op. 72b (1805/06/14)
    - [A-R excerpt 1](#)
    - [A-R excerpt 2](#)
    - [Complete video recording](#)
- W.A. Mozart (1756–1791)
  - *Don Giovanni* (1787)
    - [A-R excerpts](#)
    - [Full video recording](#)
  - *Idomeneo* (1781)
    - [Recording](#)
  - [Piano concerto in A major, K. 488](#) (1786)
    - [Recording](#)
  - Requiem in D minor, K. 622 (1791)
    - [A-R excerpt \(Introit\)](#)
    - [Recording of excerpt](#)
- F.J. Haydn (1732–1809)
  - [String Quartet, Op. 33, no. 2, “The Joke”](#) (1781)
    - [Video recording](#)
  - [String Quartet in F major, Op. 77, no. 2](#) (1799)
    - [Video recording](#)
  - [Symphony No. 104, “London”](#) (1795)
    - [Video recording](#)
  - [Piano Sonata no. 49 in E-flat Major Hob.XVI:49](#) (1789)
    - [Video recording](#)

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*Main Concepts*

- How the late Classical era intensifies (rather than wholly re-thinks) trends found earlier in the period, especially oppositions (counterpoint/homophony; instrumental style/vocal style; public/private scope and style)
- The overall development towards a more outwardly reaching and “public” style, while chamber music and domestic music-making increase in popularity
- Formal innovations and experiments become yet more overt, often strongly manipulating but not breaking the conventions developed earlier in the eighteenth century
- Although the classical period is often associated with instrumental genres (notably the symphony and string quartet), there is a continual flourishing of vocal music in the era, and all the major composers of the era write large-scale vocal works and are strongly influenced by its aesthetics
- Beethoven’s middle- and late-period music exemplifies many of the above-mentioned trends in the era and is also held up (now and within Beethoven’s own lifetime) as embodying romanticism

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

1. Explain the joke in Haydn's Op. 33, no. 2, "The Joke." Haydn described Op. 33 (to his publisher) as having been composed in a "new and special manner." Scholars have understood this in a variety of ways. Some take this statement as an indication of something quite new in his style; other refer to it more as a sales slogan, slapped on the collection by the composer of many string quartets to help ensure their success. How unique is the "joke" of Op. 33, no. 2 within Classical music?
2. With reference to the score of "Batti, batti, o bel Masetto" from Act 1 scene 16 of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, explain how Mozart's music helps to further plot and characterization in this scene through the use and manipulation of established musical conventions.
3. Does the Overture of Mozart's *Don Giovanni* act as a mere "curtain raiser," or does it have some further dramatic function with regard to the work as a whole? In answering this question, study the finale in particular.
4. Joseph Kerman and others have been particularly disparaging of the fourth quartet of Beethoven's Op. 18 set. Kerman writes, "And the Quartet in C minor (op. 18, no. 4), surely, is the exceptional work in the op. 18 series; exceptional, by its weakness, in the entire corpus of Beethoven quartets."<sup>1</sup> Examine the music of the first movement carefully. In your answer you may agree or disagree with Kerman (or both), but be sure to back up your arguments, taking into account all relevant musical parameters (melody, harmony, texture, timbre, rhythm, register etc.).
5. Why is Beethoven's *Sinfonia Eroica* is often held up as a "watershed" work? Examine the music of the second movement, Marcia Funebre, closely, and read about its genesis. You may like to refer to the Wikipedia article [link [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Symphony\\_No.\\_3\\_\(Beethoven\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Symphony_No._3_(Beethoven))]; especially section 3.2 "Dedication"].

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Kerman, *The Beethoven Quartets* (New York: Knopf, 1967), 71.

## Key to Exercises

- 1. Explain the joke in Haydn’s Op. 33, no. 2, “The Joke.” Haydn described Op. 33 (to his publisher) as having been composed in a “new and special manner.” Scholars have understood this in a variety of ways. Some take this statement as an indication of something quite new in his style; other refer to it more as a sales slogan, slapped on the collection by the composer of many string quartets to help ensure their success. How unique is the “joke” of Op. 33, no. 2 within Classical music?.**

The last movement is a rondo, a form in which the main theme alternates with contrasting tunes, usually in another key. In Op. 33, no. 2, the main theme is lively and joyous. It returns as expected after a final contrasting section, but now it is burdened hesitant pauses, as if the composer (or rather the performers) are unclear as to how or when to end the work. The work ends in a soft whisper: more question than answer. This movement is almost a parody of the *Sturm und Drang* of Haydn’s quartets Opp. 17 and 20. What Haydn had in mind with the “new and special way” can be debated: arguably this was not so much about wit and humor per se (which are of course by-products of this musical manipulation of convention), but rather the manipulation and exploration itself—a technique he also applies in the first movement (among numerous other places in this and other works). There, the opening theme is fractured into pieces as soon as it is stated and its component motifs played with dexterously. And even in the solemn Largo sostenuto slow movement, Haydn explores the idea of fragmentation of musical ideas, filling the center of the work full of syncopation and varied dynamics, which have the destabilizing function putting weight on silences and creating an echo.

- 2. With reference to the score of “Batti, batti, o bel Masetto” from Act 1 scene 16 of Mozart’s *Don Giovanni*, explain how Mozart’s music helps to further plot and characterization in this scene through the use and manipulation of established musical conventions.**

The context is Zerlina’s invitation to Masetto to beat her, an attempt at a peaceful reconciliation (Masetto is angry with Zerlina for going off with Don Giovanni). The aria draws on the musical conventions of the French courtly gavotte, a couples’ dance that involves ever changing-pairings, while still remaining with one partner. In this way, Mozart uses the conventions of dance music to suggest Zerlina’s intention to remain true to Masetto, while still retaining the right to flirt.

- 3. Does the Overture of Mozart’s *Don Giovanni* act as a mere “curtain raiser,” or does it have some further dramatic function with regard to the work as a whole? In answering this question, study the Finale in particular.**

The Overture of *Don Giovanni* follows the reforms instituted by the likes of C. W. Gluck, which were geared to creating coherent plots in which the musical numbers flowed one

from the other, and the choruses and overture were parts of an integral whole. The overture prefigures the plot in several concrete ways, the most striking of which is the sounding of musical elements from the sublime finale, in which the Don grasps the hand of the Commendatore before being condemned to the fires of Hell. In particular, the swirling, chromatic “scales to nowhere” prefigure the invocation of the musical sublime, suggesting terror and incommensurability that might be associated with concept of hellfire and damnation.

- 4. Joseph Kerman and others have been particularly disparaging of the fourth quartet of Beethoven’s Op. 18 set. Kerman writes, “And the Quartet in C minor (op. 18, no. 4), surely, is the exceptional work in the op. 18 series; exceptional, by its weakness, in the entire corpus of Beethoven quartets.” Examine the music of the first movement carefully. In your answer you may agree or disagree with Kerman (or both), but be sure to back up your arguments, taking into account all relevant musical parameters (melody, harmony, texture, timbre, rhythm, register etc.).**

[One can choose to agree or disagree in this answer; in mine I’ve chosen the latter.] Contrary to Kerman’s assessment, there is considerable sophistication in the use of the first violin’s register in this work. The first movement opens with a fourth, G–c, in the first violin’s low register. The movement then expands outwards until the recapitulation where, just prior to the coda, c<sup>'''</sup> is attained in the first violin and quitted by leap to open G—a dramatic reversal of the opening interval of a fourth. The second movement opens with a reference to the opening fourth, projected up the octave, then remains relatively low in register as befits its emphasis on fugato. The Menuetto begins in the mid-low register, with the leap of a fourth heard in the original octave. In the course of the Trio, the first violin “overshoots” the high point of the first movement, leaping exuberantly up to d<sup>'''</sup>. The first violin’s concluding turn figure, in the low register, is reminiscent of that which decorates the opening theme of the first movement. This is all reminiscent of Haydn’s use of register in his quartets, notable Op. 20, no. 2, which deploys similar procedures.

- 5. Why is Beethoven’s *Sinfonia Eroica* is often held up as a “watershed” work? Examine the music of the second movement, *Marcia Funebre*, closely, and read about its genesis. You may like to refer to the Wikipedia article [[link https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Symphony No. 3 \(Beethoven\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Symphony_No._3_(Beethoven))]; especially section 3.2 “Dedication”].**

It was unusual for the time to incorporate a funeral march into a symphony, although not at all unusual to have a slow movement, and relatively common to include extramusical references. Nor is it surprising that Beethoven chose to dedicate this work to Napoleon and then changed his mind and re-dedicated it to Prince Joseph Franz Maximilian Lobkowitz—his fee-paying noble patron. Perhaps this re-dedication had less to do with political idealism that later historians (proponents of the “watershed” epithet) would like: in an era of invasion and high inflation, monetary considerations were a high priority for the composer. In reception terms this work, and this particular movement, were

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considered outstanding from the first hearing—and difficult. The work was immediately identified as tricky to play and listen to by critics and was much arranged during the course of the nineteenth century, a function not just of its popularity, but also of listeners' repeated attempts to try to understand it. In heralding a new era of complex orchestral music, which would drive silent listening in the concert hall and high-level orchestral performance training, the work was certainly a watershed.