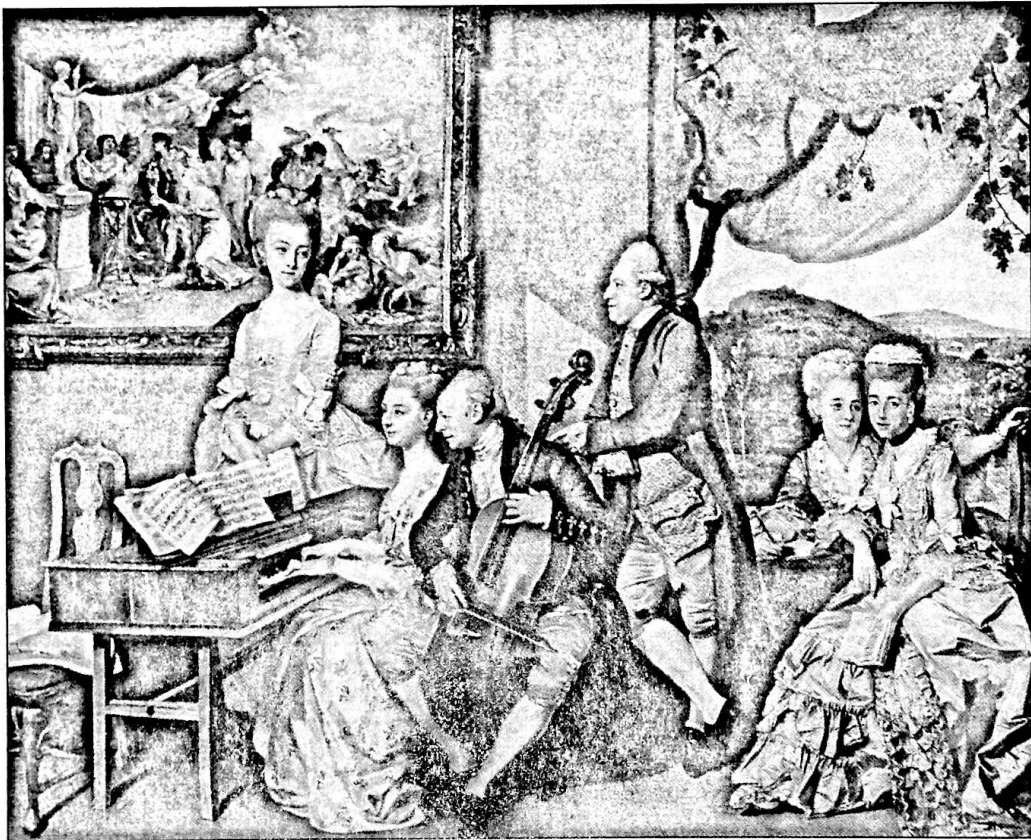


## Clear, accessible music

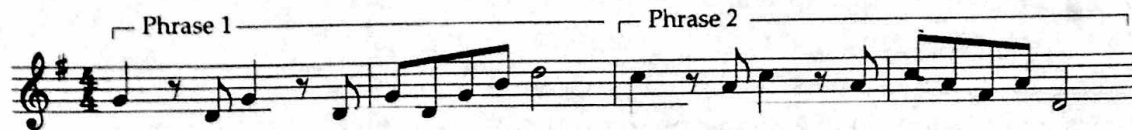
Music was becoming a source of entertainment to more and more people. Composers had to appeal to the broader public, because many more people were becoming involved with music, either as concertgoers or home musicians. They wanted music to be less complex to listen to and easier to play, music that was lighter, clearer and more accessible. Balance and proportion were important to them. One of the ways composers achieved these goals was by using short phrases that occur in regular patterns. Another was to write lyrical melodies accompanied by chords. These chords were emerging from the major/minor key system that had been developing throughout the Baroque period and was now much more clearly understood.



*George, Third Earl of Cowper, and the Gore Family*, by Johann Zoffany, shows a group of aristocrats making music. The square piano was very commonly found in homes in the late 1700s.

### Short balanced phrases

Classical composers favoured two- or four-bar phrases instead of the typical long lines found in Baroque music. Look at this illustration of the first line from Mozart's *A Little Night Music*. You can see that the first phrase contains two bars, and the notes generally seem to go up. The second two bars are almost the same, except that the notes go down. It is as though the first phrase is opening and the second is closing. This kind of balance makes the patterns in the music easy for the listener to understand.



A Little Night Music, Mozart

### Repetitions and signposts

Composers in the Classical era strove for clarity. **Themes**, for instance, are introduced, then repeated again immediately so that the audience becomes familiar with them, and repeated again later in the piece. As well, Classical composers built in signposts to tell the listeners where the music was going. As a way of leading into a theme, they often used little transitional phrases called **bridge passages** that suggest that something important is coming up. Closing off a theme was just as important. **Cadences** are sequences of notes or chords that seem to close a musical section and composers of this period often repeated the chords in the cadences many times to tell the audience that they were finished talking about one idea and were going to begin talking about something else.

A **theme** is a musical idea, a tune that forms the basis of a musical composition.

A **bridge passage** is a musical link between two important sections of a composition. It often includes a change of key.

A **cadence** is a melodic or a harmonic formula that ends a work, or a section of a work, or a phrase, and suggests that it brings a conclusion.

An example of a final cadence, this one from Clementi's *Sonatina*, op.36, no.3



Specific Features

# Lyrical melodies with harmonic accompaniment

The word **texture** refers to the way the different lines of the music fit together. In the Renaissance and Baroque periods, the prevailing texture was that of several melodies woven together. This is called **polyphony**. Melody with harmonic accompaniment is the predominant texture of the music written in the Classical era. This kind of music is called **homophony**.

Classical composers wrote elegant, lyrical lines of music and the harmonies acted like vertical columns of sound holding up the melodies. The polyphony of Baroque composers was not abandoned completely, but it was not as commonly used. This change in favour of homophony was one of the most momentous changes in musical history, because melody and accompaniment remained the prevailing texture of serious Western music until well into the 1900s, and continues to be the basis for most popular music such as jazz, rock and pop.

The French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, complaining about polyphony, said that listening to four lines of music played at the same time makes as much sense as listening to four people talking at once.

**Texture** describes the way the individual notes in the music are blended together.

**Polyphony** is a texture in which several independent lines of music are woven together.

**Homophony** is a texture in which the melodic line leads and is supported by a chordal accompaniment.



Polyphony  
Invention No.1, J.S. Bach

Homophony: Broken harmony  
Arietta, W. A. Mozart



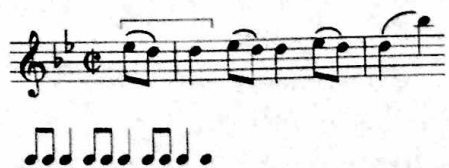
Homophony: Solid harmony

The Alberti bass

The composer Domenico Alberti (1710-1740) did not invent this kind of harmony but he used it so frequently it became associated with his name. The chords in the bass line are broken into separate notes played one after the other. The harmonies remain the same, but the broken chords add a sense of movement and lightness.



## More flexible rhythm



First motif



Second motif

Classical composers thought that the driving, unchanging rhythm common to the Baroque period was boring. They preferred to write music with greater variety. Look at this illustration of the notes that make up the motifs that Mozart used in the first movement of his Symphony no.40 in G Minor. The first motif is made up largely of quarter and eighth notes all grouped the same way, and the second has contrasting longer and shorter notes, like dotted half notes and sixteenths. This kind of variation avoided the unflagging predictability of Baroque music.

## Dynamics

During the Baroque period, instrumental music tended to be played at a constant level of loudness and softness. Classical composers wanted to add more variety to the volume at which their music was played. They planned that particular passages would be played at specific volumes, and it was during this period that scores began to have dynamic marks like *pp*, or *mf*, added to them, so that performers would know exactly what volume the composer wanted.

Crescendos (growing louder) and decrescendos (getting softer) also began to be written into the music during the Classical period and they added a great deal of excitement. Performers wanted their music to grow louder and softer within a single passage, the way a singer's voice can, and they began varying the dynamics more and more, shaping the different melodies they played.

### Dynamic Marks

*pp* = pianissimo, very soft

*mp* = mezzo piano, moderately soft

*f* = forte, loud

*p* = piano, soft

*mf* = mezzo forte, moderately loud

*ff* = fortissimo, very loud

Crescendo mark

Diminuendo/Decrescendo mark