Classical **d**

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A term which, along with its related forms, 'classic', 'classicism', 'classicistic' etc., has been applied to a wide variety of music from different cultures. It evolved from the Latin *classicus* (a taxpayer, later also a writer, of the highest class) through the French *classique* into English 'classical' and German *Klassik*. In one of the earliest definitions (R. Cotgrave: *Dictionarie of the French and English Tongues*, 1611), *classique* is translated as 'classical, formall, orderlie, in due or fit ranke; also, approved, authenticall, chiefe, principall'. The two parts of this definition will be retained here and glossed as (i) formal discipline, (ii) model of excellence, supplemented by (iii) that which has to do with Greek or Latin antiquity (*Dictionnaire de l'Académie*, 1694), and (iv) that which is opposed to 'romantic', the latter understood as morbid and unruly (Goethe, 1829). Of the various meanings, (ii) has had the widest currency over the longest time. In this general sense, for example, Forkel recommended J.S. Bach's main keyboard works as 'klassisch' (1802, rendered in the English translation of 1820 as 'classical'). Generic excellence accounts for the similar labelling of Josquin's motets, Palestrina's masses, Couperin's suites, Corelli's concertos, Handel's oratorios and Schubert's lieder – though as Finscher has observed (1966), the term is properly reserved for works in genres ample enough in scope and developmental possibilities to be susceptible of 'classical' fulfilment.

In the early modern era, it was more often in the first two senses enumerated above that the terms 'classic' and 'classical' were applied with regard to literature and art, with analogies to Greek and Roman culture only gradually coming to the fore. This was especially true as regards music (e.g. Scacchi, 1643; Schütz, 1648), for which no antique heritage was known to survive (see Nägeli, 1826). As Weber has shown (1992), it was in 18th-century England that 'classical' first came to stand for a particular canon of works in performance, distinct from other music in terms primarily of quality, but also to some extent age (the Concert of Ancient Music generally restricted offerings to pieces written more than two decades earlier). Civic ritual, religion and moral activism figured significantly in this novel construction of musical taste, converging notably in the cult of Handel. On the Continent, where canonic concert repertories were slower to develop (or were not entirely public, as with the Viennese concert series organized by Gottfried van Swieten during the 1780s and Raphael Georg Kiesewetter during the 1810s), 'classical' music continued up to the end of the 18th century to be understood mainly in its traditional senses - as when Constanze Mozart deemed the value of her late husband's compositional fragments equal to that of 'fragments of classical authors' (letter of 1 March 1800). The composer's biographer Niemetschek, in positing the 'classical worth' of Mozart's music, had earlier written (1797, rev. 1808) that 'The masterpieces of the Romans and Greeks please more and more through repeated reading, and as one's taste is refined – the same is true for both expert and amateur with respect to the hearing of Mozart's music'. For Spazier (1800), too, a classical work of music was one that 'must gain from each [new] analysis'.

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1. The Viennese 'Classical' idiom.

Well into the 19th century, many partisans of 'classical' music, continental as well as British, defined their preferred repertory negatively, in opposition to mere virtuoso display, Romantic music, Rossini and other 'trumpery'. But by the 1830s 'classical' music was coming increasingly to be identified specifically with the 'Viennese classics' composed by Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven, and it is to these that the term-complex usually refers when encountered without further qualification in more recent writings on music. The notion that these works constituted a 'classical period' or 'school' arose among German writers in the 19th century, in part by analogy with the Weimarer Klassik created by Goethe and, to a lesser extent, Schiller. Kiesewetter (1834) referred to 'the German or (perhaps more rightly) ... the Viennese school', and other writers followed his lead. (His limitation of this school to Mozart and Haydn was endorsed by Finscher (MGG2), who cited Beethoven's slowness in approaching the genres in which they excelled, among other factors.) The explicit linkage of 'Viennese' with 'classical' was codified in the early 20th-century writings of Sandberger, Adler and Wilhelm Fischer, along with explanatory schemes regarding its evolution. Blume extended the boundaries of this putative period back to the middle of the 18th century and forward to include all Schubert's works, weakening any conception of a closely knit or precisely defined movement: he specifically denied the possibility of stylistic unity within the period between the deaths of Bach and Beethoven. Rosen restricted what he called the 'classical style' mainly to the instrumental works of the mature Haydn and Mozart, and of Beethoven. In this view, for which Finscher found early 19th-century documentation (e.g. Wendt, 1831, 1836), there was a stylistic period that stretched from Haydn's obbligato homophony, achieved in the 1770s and capped by the op.33 quartets, to the threshold of Beethoven's last period, when the 'classical' forms are supposed to be overstepped or disintegrating.

That there was a 'classical idiom' shared by Haydn, Mozart and, to an extent, Beethoven is more generally agreed than is the existence of a 'classical period' (IMSCR VIII: New York 1961). If applied to the music exclusively of these three composers, or to the historical phenomenon of their posthumous reputations, the appellation 'classical idiom' is justified; in describing music generally during these composers' lifetimes, it is perhaps better to speak of a 'Viennese' or 'Austro-Bohemian' school (with analogous terms for other local traditions), rather than of a diluted 'classical period'. Some writers of the time, such as John Marsh, distinguished only between the 'modern' style and all that came before it. Haydn's central role in the refinement and propagation of this new style is manifest (see Koch, 1793, and Marsh, 1796), despite his early geographic isolation, and differences of opinion concerning the date by which his works display full mastery. Haydn's abandonment during the 1770s of certain more local or personal features of his style – possibly connected with the wider circulation of his music in print – was followed by his achievement of an individual synthesis of pleasing tunefulness (the *galant* style) with the learned devices of counterpoint he had previously used somewhat forcedly and selfconsciously (the op.20 quartets) – though Webster (1991) has pointed to fundamental continuities of technique between the composer's music in this and later periods. By about 1775 Haydn had put behind him, for the most part, the mannerisms of 'Empfindsamkeit' - though this idiom still retained some utility for certain types of keyboard and chamber music - and the obsessive pathos of *Sturm und Drang*, and assimilated in his own language the fantasy qualities, 'redende [speaking] Thematik' and developmental skills of C.P.E. Bach. Mozart followed Haydn closely in the 1770s in his quartets and symphonies, and the dedication of the six quartets to Haydn speaks eloquently enough

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of their close relationship. Other elements in the synthesis achieved by both are use of dynamics and orchestral colour in a thematic way (perhaps a legacy of the Mannheim School); use of rhythm, particularly harmonic rhythm, to articulate large-scale forms; use of modulation to build longer arches of tension and release; and the witty and typically Austrian mixture of comic and serious traits (pilloried by north German critics, who held firm against any alloying of the *opera seria* style by that of *opera buffa*). During the 1780s Haydn's instrumental works were very widely printed and diffused. His language had become understood (as he told Mozart when he set out for England) by all the world. This universality, which Mozart also achieved, especially with his concertos and operas, deserves to be called 'classical' even under the most precise definition (ii above).

A strong case may also be made for both composers on grounds of formal discipline (i). Their high technical skill is patent. Sovereign ease of writing, learning lightly worn, happiness in remaining within certain conventions or at least not straying too far from them – conventions that were bound to please and aid the public – these mark what Henri Peyre called the 'classical' attitude. Peyre posited further that the 'classical' artist, regardless of the field or period, worked in complicity with his public, attempting to fulfil its expectations, and was not afraid to be pleasing or to submit to society's conditions. Haydn had more success, initially, in pleasing a very wide public, than did Mozart, but from the latter's own words it is known that he wrote for 'all kinds of ears - tin ears excepted'. In this easy relationship with the expectations of the consumer lies one explanation for the fecundity of Mozart and Haydn, for the hundreds of works with which they enriched all genres (absolute mastery of every genre makes Mozart in this sense the last of the universal composers). Colossal productivity such as theirs presupposes a down-to-earth, workmanlike approach to the craft. Mozart once described, in typically earthy language, how he wrote music ('as sows piddle'). A similar fecundity was enjoyed by Boccherini, Clementi, Gossec and many other masters of the time. Haydn's acceptance of certain conventions did not prevent his symphonies from being received by his contemporaries as highly original, and so dramatic in nature that they seemed literally to speak. Grétry (Mémoires, 1789) urged them as models for opera composers, and marvelled at Haydn's unique ability to get so much out of a single motif. In 1806 specific and detailed programmes were published for both Haydn's Drumroll Symphony (Momigny) and Mozart's Symphony K543 (August Apel, in poetic form), dramatizing these works even further.

Gerber summed up Haydn's symphonic style in his *Lexicon* (1790):

Everything speaks when his orchestra begins to play. Each subordinate voice, which in the works of other composers would be merely insignificant, often becomes with him a decisive principal part. He commands every refinement, even if it comes from the Gothic period of the grey contrapuntists. But as soon as Haydn prepares it for our ear it assumes a pleasing character in place of its former stiffness. He possesses the great art of making his music oftentimes seem familiar; thus, despite all the contrapuntal refinements therein, he becomes popular and pleasing to every musician.

Haydn's reliance on actual folk melodies has been shown in relatively few cases, but touches of local colour enliven the fabric of his music from the earliest divertimento-style works to *The Seasons*. His art was popular by intention, and was so received. Mozart too was aware of seeking a middle ground between what

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was too difficult for the public and what was easy and threadbare (letter of 28 December 1782). Beethoven stood close to both at first, compositionally and in his aim of pleasing a wide public (especially in his works involving the piano); in orchestral style he took up where Haydn left off. The wave of music from Revolutionary France also had a powerful impact upon him and helps account for the exalted moral tone, the extra-musical messages that play an increasing role in his art from the 'Eroica' Symphony onwards. Whether the mature master tended more towards the 'classical' or 'romantic' has been, and will be, long debated. The circumspection or self-possession (Besonnenheit) that Hoffmann found in his mature works, and the degree to which his last compositions in particular are preoccupied with the premises of musical language itself, betray the deep roots of his manner in the music of Haydn and Mozart. His style of life marked him as a romantic in the eyes of his contemporaries, who also noted quite early his 'tendency towards the mysterious and gloomy' in music (Ignaz Ritter von Seyfried, 1799). By turning increasingly inward, away from the public, in his last years Beethoven strayed from one of the ideals of 'classical' art: ease of communication. In the Jean Paul sense he appeared to be a 'romantic' artist, wild, extravagant, boundless, isolated and possessing the other traits then coming into fashion with the young German *littérateurs*. But this means little because anything they perceived as imaginative, deeply moving and colourful, including the music of Haydn and Mozart, automatically became 'romantic' (e.g. E.T.A. Hoffmann). One measure of the distance in attitude travelled beyond Mozart and Haydn is Beethoven's decreasing productivity, matching his increasing selfconsciousness about being original – the necessity for every work to be a universe unto itself, born of struggle and speaking an individual expressive language. Perhaps this striving for the ultra-expressive can usefully be contrasted with a 'classical' attitude of genuine modesty and willing restraint, personal and artistic. One suspects that Mozart would have reacted to Beethoven at his most 'pathetic' the way he did to the Klopstock style, which he found 'sublime, beautiful, anything you like, but too exaggerated and pompous for my delicate ears', or to the music of Schweitzer's Rosamunde, in which he found 'nothing natural, everything exaggerated, and badly written for the voices'. Mozart recurrently stressed the virtues of moderation, the unforced, the thread ('il filo') that allowed one musical thought to follow naturally upon another.

The interpenetration of French, Italian and German music during the last part of the 18th century – long disregarded by scholars more intent on studying the quirks of 'sonata form' or defining the 'classical style' – is indisputable, and argues in favour of a 'classical' moment, if not period. Similarities in musical discourse at Naples, Paris and Berlin outweighed the dissimilarities, a situation that did not obtain 50 years earlier, when critics could perceive only national differences. A cosmopolitan style, cultivated in all the great capitals, was carried, through massive diffusion by prints and copies, to every corner of Western civilization. The coining of this *lingua franca* does not necessarily depend on knowledge of the Viennese 'classical idiom'; rather, its common denominator – the irreducible core of stylistic unity – would seem to rest upon the uncontested dominion of Italian opera. Dent went so far as to state 'the classical tradition is nothing more or less than the Italian tradition'.

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2. Earlier 'classicisms'.

Humanist leanings tended to promote the subsuming of definitions (i) and (ii) above under (iii), especially in France. But even in France, antiquity's models of excellence were deemed to have been equalled or surpassed about 1670–85 by modern writers like La Fontaine, Molière and Racine ('nos auteurs classiques', as Voltaire later called them). They, and Voltaire himself, became literary models for all Europe during the 18th century, and were accordingly given status as 'classical'. By analogy with literature, some scholars have attached the same sobriquet to French 17th– and 18th–century music, although it had not nearly so wide a sway. According to Dufourcq, 'la musique française classique' stretches from the founding of Baïf's Académie in 1571, the most important musical consequence of French humanism, until the Revolution. Setting in opposition 'l'opéra française classique' (from Lully to Gluck) and 'romantique' (the 19th century) betrays the literary distinctions that were imported into France pursuant to Goethe's vexing dichotomy (iv above).

The Arcadian Academy founded at Rome in 1690 became the focal point of Italian literary 'classicism'. It promoted a more sober approach to form and language, avoidance of 'Baroque' hyperbole (so-called 'Marinismo') and explicit submission to antique models (but implicit recognition of French models as well). Reform of the opera libretto by Zeno and Metastasio was a direct consequence of Arcadian 'classicism'. While refining diction and polishing language for specifically musical purposes, Metastasio separated the comic and serious genres and raised the latter to an elevation of style it had not known. In his aria texts, in particular – which he considered to be comparable in function to the choruses in ancient tragedy – he reduced vocabulary to a small number of quite simple, universal images (*see* Opera seria). By the time he left for Vienna in 1730 he was already regarded as the most influential model in the field, the final codifier of aria opera. His debts to the French tragedians were, somewhat to his embarrassment, recognized as such at the time (as were the debts, more freely admitted, owed by Goldoni to Molière). There is nothing extraordinary in that one literary 'classicism' should stand on the shoulders of another, imitation belonging to the phenomenon by nature.

Quite extraordinary, on the other hand, is the effect that Metastasian elegance had on the tonal art. The poet's mellifluous language and clarity of expression taught musicians similar virtues, or so they believed. Eximeno (y Pujades) (1774) specified that it was Metastasio's 'dolcezza' that prompted Italian composers and singers to raise music to its 18th-century peak of perfection. Arteaga (1783) equated the reform of the libretto with the beginnings of 'modern' music. By their own admission, 'modernists' as diverse as Hasse, Jommelli, Rousseau, Grétry and Paisiello claimed Metastasio's verses as their main source of inspiration. Mozart, typically, cut his compositional teeth by setting Metastasian arias, and was involved with the poet's works right up to the end, in *La clemenza di Tito* (the very drama that Voltaire proclaimed 'equal, if not superior to the most beautiful productions of the Greeks'). Haydn rated his setting of Metastasio's *L'isola disabitata* among his best works. Cimarosa was still setting Metastasio, albeit with many modifications, to the end of his life. The Berlin critic Krause, in what might be called a poetics of Metastasian opera, *Von der musikalischen Poesie* (1752), wrote that 'good taste consists in flattering the ear and touching the heart; it has reached perfection in the Italian operas of Hasse and Graun'. C.P.E. Bach still subscribed to this view when he wrote in his autobiography of 1773 that 'Berlin [Graun] and Dresden [Hasse] represented a new era in music as a whole and in its most accurate and fine performance in

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particular', a highpoint which he feared had since passed, owing to inroads made by the comic style. Hasse was widely considered the leading figure of the style the 18th century called 'galant' and as such was one of the main predecessors of the 'classical' synthesis. This style prevailed up to and beyond the middle of the century (well beyond in Berlin) and constituted one of the most admired translations of Arcadian classicism into music (Metastasio preferred Hasse above all other composers). At the same time two other Arcadians, Goldoni and Galuppi, raised *opera buffa* to a peak of literary-musical excellence, the one inspiring the other to new heights of parody, irony and wit (providing worthy forerunners on the path leading to the collaborations between Da Ponte and Mozart). Galuppi's definition of good music, told to Burney, was 'vaghezza', 'chiarezza' and 'buona modulazione'; his own music shows that even the last applies mainly to melody. What sounded 'modern' to the generation that matured around the mid-century was elegant, affecting melody, of a periodic nature, tastefully 'graced' with many fine nuances, and simply accompanied. Even C.P.E. Bach was so caught up by this aesthetic that he deprecated the operatic arias (but not the oratorios) of Handel, saying of him 'he could never have become a Hasse or a Graun even if he had had the opportunity'. Instrumental music found no rationale with Quantz and Bach except as an imitation of fine singing: Italian singing, to be sure, and above all that paragon of the age, the castrato.

3. Neo-classicism, Romantic classicism.

Forces were abroad in the mid-18th century that would eventually overthrow the notion that music existed to 'flatter the ear' (but not its corollary about 'touching the heart'). At first less literary than artistic and archaeological, they proceeded from the emotional rediscovery (once again) of the force and sublimity of antique monuments, whether intact or, more characteristically, in ruins. The movement began in the 1740s with the coming together of Piranesi and members of the French academy in Rome. Hugh Honour described their artistic breakthrough as follows: 'Encouraged to look at Antiquity with fresh eyes, they sought its essence in the primitive - painters in the spare drawings of Greek vases and architects in the robustly masculine, austerely undecorated Doric temple at Paestum'. An important turning-point was the expedition led by the Marquis de Marigny (brother of Mme de Pompadour) to Paestum in 1750, the occasion which produced Jacques Soufflot's famous sketch of the ruined temple of Neptune from location, a sketch that was later engraved, used for an actual stage-setting (1755), and influenced subsequent ruins shown on the operatic stage. Out of a collective vision of an antiquity to be revived in all its sombre, even primitive qualities emerged what art historians now call 'Neo-classicism' or 'Romantic classicism'. Theorists and critics were quick to seize upon the trend, among them Caylus, who started bringing out his illustrated Recueil d'antiquités in 1752; Laugier, who in 1753 attacked both the Italian Baroque and the French Rococo for having strayed from the simple truths of nature; Lodoli, whose rigorist ideas on architecture were codified by Algarotti the same year; and Winckelmann, whose better-known work appeared in 1755, mixing sentimentalism with an idealistic nostalgia for everything Greek, in which he saw 'noble simplicity'. These and similar works represent a reaction against the earlier 18th century's playful treatment of the antique heritage - against 'la mythologie galante', as it has been termed. Longing for the grandeurs of a greater past (whether that of antiquity, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, or Louis XIV) back beyond the immediate past accounts for the beginnings of both 'romantic' and 'neo-classic' art; the latter has been called a dialect within the language of the former.

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Algarotti was in the vanguard of operatic as well as architectural reform. In Saggio sopra l'opera in musica (1755) he advocated a return to first principles, suggesting a closer look at ancient drama and even at ancient amphitheatres. Larger and better opera houses in Italy had provided the models for the rest of Europe since well before Algarotti's time, but no one spelt out as he did the needs with regard to both sight and sound. Larger orchestras were the consequence of increasingly large theatres, and ultimately a style of music to fill them, truly symphonic and grandiose, instead of chamber-like (as in the early symphonies of Sammartini). Concomitant with this passion for grandeur along antique lines, which increased towards the end of the century, was the revival of interest in the operatic chorus. Before Algarotti even Krause had awarded the palm to French opera in this respect, and for integrated ballets, saying that Italian opera could only be improved by adding these resources to its basic strengths. That is what happened at Parma a few years later when Frugoni adapted some of Rameau's librettos for setting by Traetta; in the preface to *Ippolito ed Aricia* (1759) Frugoni defended the introduction of choruses by referring specifically to Greek practices. Earlier, at Rome, Jommelli had taken the bold step of ending his Attilio Regolo (1753) with an impassioned obbligato recitative and a chorus. It is no coincidence that Rome and Parma, two of the main centres of 'neo-classical' art in the 1750s, were the main meeting-grounds of French and Italian ideas, nor that Jommelli and Traetta worked for patrons who played such a role in the archaeological excavations.

Jommelli's appointment at Stuttgart in 1754 had an electrifying effect on German music similar to Hasse's at Dresden 20 years earlier. Traetta reached tragic heights in his works for Vienna (1761, 1763) and Mannheim (1762) for which Heinse could find no better praise than to call them 'classical' and 'worthy of the ancient tragedies'. A certain mutual strengthening between artists, such as Haydn and Mozart later experienced, is evident in the relations between the Neapolitan Traetta and the Bohemian Gluck around 1760; as a result, Vienna's future eminence was already well launched. Gluck, like Traetta, had been much involved with French dramatic music in the 1750s. In setting opéra comique he acquired the popular tunefulness that this genre promoted, corresponding with its seeming naturalness. His involvement with ballet, too, together with his experience as a composer of opera seria, endowed him with a fund of resources with which to create a new supra-national kind of musical tragedy. The vision he achieved in Orfeo ed Euridice (1762, Vienna), with the important collaboration of his poet, Calzabigi (as well as the choreographer, Angiolini, and scenographer, Quaglio), represented a triumphant expression in opera, the total art form, of the new wave of radical severity in expression. His contemporaries viewed Gluck's control of vast time spans as epochal: the working against each other of the Infernal and Elysian scenes in Orfeo, for example. They also singled out his painting of gesture in music (which influenced subsequent composers of melodramas, dramatic ballets and symphonies; see Sturm und Drang).

The publication of *Orfeo ed Euridice* at Paris in 1764 caused little stir. A decade earlier the style that subsequently came to be known as 'Rococo' had been superseded, almost overnight. Much notice had been taken of a turn towards 'Greek simplicity' in spoken drama with Guimond de La Touche's *Iphigénie en Tauride* (1757), which Grimm and Diderot praised because 'it suppressed all *galant* intrigues such as had heretofore disfigured the genre'. But Grimm could not bring himself to credit Calzabigi for doing the same in opera, and his prejudices against non-Italian musicians prevented him from recognizing in Gluck's score a similar turn towards simplicity and stark, unadorned pathos, nourished by dreams of ancient

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glories. Only later, after Gluck's personal triumph in Paris, did Grimm admit that his music represented a transgression of earlier boundaries, going beyond Metastasio's vision of Arcadia, to achieve that same sobriety and gravity that he applauded elsewhere in the arts.

The tragic tone of Gluck's *Orfeo* and *Alceste* (1767) helped feed the subsequent wave of 'Sturm und Drang' pathos in the Viennese symphonists, and even contributed to the deepening of Haydn's symphonic style (according to Feder). These operas, together with Gluck's masterpieces for Paris in the 1770s (pronounced 'classiques' by Grétry), established the bases upon which musical tragedy could continue to evolve. Piccinni's, Salieri's and Sacchini's French operas, as well as those of Méhul and Le Sueur, extended the lineage, which came to a magnificent climax of tension in Cherubini's *Médée* (1797), a work which subsumes Haydn's symphonic development as well as various French and Italian operatic styles, and which, moreover, had a powerful impact on Beethoven. In explaining his *Mort d'Adam* (1809), Le Sueur made a statement that characterizes the attitude of this whole school; he had 'avoided all semblance of the musical Gothic and followed only the grand taste of the antique, so that the work was not directed to one country, or one people, but rather to the brotherhood of the human race'. Similarly, Rousseau believed that his invention of *mélodrame* revived the *mélopée* of the Greeks. Previous claims to the contrary notwithstanding, it is clearly necessary to consider antiquity (definition iii) in relation to what was 'classical' in music, because that is how musicians themselves then thought.

The various 'classicisms' in the arts of Europe are not contradictory, but rather like a series of waves piling towards the same shore: the one phase builds upon the other, just as a single art is nourished often, and reciprocally, by a sister art. What the Viennese 'classics' attained could not have come about without passing through the purifying fires of that mid-18th-century upheaval which generated 'Sturm und Drang' and 'Romantic classicism'. It was fortunate that the most revolutionary creative spirits, those seeking raw antiquity and primitive passions, had the strengths of Arcadian 'classicism' to fall back upon, as necessary, and even beyond these, the achievements of French 'classicism'. In a work like Mozart's *Idomeneo*, of crucial significance to his subsequent artistic development, the contribution from each of these phases can be identified, which does not deprive the opera of its purity, consistency or tragic dignity. Mozart's motivic and tonal control extended over the span of an entire opera for the first time in *Idomeneo*. Such careful relating of every detail to the whole can be regarded as fully 'classical', in contrast with the more random stringing together of tonalities characteristic of Hasse and the *galant* phase. Haydn achieved the same organic unity in his last period, most superbly in *The Creation* and *The Seasons*, two monuments that serenely summarize his life's work, while mirroring his lifelong and deep-seated feelings for nature.

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See also

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