

# Classical Music Composers? (1750 – 1827)

By Andy Glover-Whitley

Recently I was working on the History aspect of the forthcoming OCA Music Foundation course and realised that more Baroque composers are known than those in the following Classical Period. Whenever I have had work from students it usually contains the usual culprits of the Classical age and so this blog is written in a hope that some may just research and listen to some of the other great names of this period and realise just what an innovative period it was in music history.

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When it comes to the Classical period in music history we have four names that dominate everything, and for the first time the cult of personality takes over from the general image of composers who were controlled by autocratic aristocrats and monarchs. Individuality of thought begins to make itself felt more than at any other time in the art of music. The four names are of course Josef Haydn, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Ludwig van Beethoven and Franz Schubert. All except Haydn were freelance composers. This was something new and unheard of at the time and each in turn contributed something very new to music in this period. Haydn was under the control of the Esterhazy's in Hungary but had an almost free reign to compose and develop ideas. Mozart broke away from the Archbishop of Salzburg to go freelance and contributed genius and originality. Beethoven was German born and lived and worked in Vienna as did Schubert. Each contributed uniqueness and genius in good measure.

So was that it, was that all the composers that there were in the classical period. Of course not. It was one of the most innovative and composer ridden periods in music history. We think of today and the fact that anyone who writes a tune is now called a composer whether they can read music or not. In the classical period you truly could not go down the streets of Vienna without falling over composers of great skill and worth who all added something to the uniqueness of the age. Vienna was the centre of the world and as some wise composer stated,

“Come the end of the world I would not wish to be anywhere else but Vienna as it is still fifty years behind the times.”

Although this statement was made in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century when the decay of the Hapsburg Empire was in full swing it does show the mind-set of people towards the city that was the centre of the musical world. The Viennese themselves did not understand the importance of the city as a musical centre and how it had shaped the

very styles of music for the last 150 years and yet the composers themselves understood its role and position only too well.

Vienna was the centre of the musical arts and remained so until the mid-1930's. It was here that so many composers and musicians congregated to make a name for themselves whether as the beneficiaries of aristocracy, or as independents scraping a living from their skills



*Josef Haydn*



*Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart*



*Ludwig van Beethoven*

*Franz Schubert*

We may not know the names anymore or the music of many of the composers from the Classical era but without them the music of the period would not have gained the fingerprints that the greats used so well to create their masterpieces.

Anyone who has seen the famous film of Peter Schaffer's play "Amadeus" may be able to name Antonio Salieri as well but after that most people would be extremely hard pressed to name a single other composer of the period.

<https://youtu.be/H2rluoNIIM>

*Antonio Salieri – Wenn dem Adler das Gefieder from Der Rauchfangkehrer*

In fact at the time many other composers were considered greater than the four that we now consider to be the master composers of the age. Many of the composers were just as innovative as the famous four in their developments. Some such as Vanhal developed little from his first works but the form and style he wrote in remained at the very core of the period's style. The work of Johann Stamitz pushed the orchestra and the Symphony into the form that we recognise today. Others such as Kozeluch or Mysliveček were as revolutionary as Beethoven in their writing and adventurous orchestrations. These were not just composers of the second rank, their music stands alongside the great four and occasionally could actually be argued to be better.

<https://youtu.be/AuCMfwAQI94>

*J.B. Vanhal Symphony in D Major*

Even a fleeting acquaintance with some of the composers is a delight but to get to know their music more intimately reaps rewards in many different ways. Occasionally a melodic shape catches you off guard, or a harmonic progression doesn't do what you expect it to. The form may not be quite what you expect and all these simple things bring your attention up short and makes you listen with even more intent to what the composer is saying. Sometimes it is the pure beauty of the melody that just enraptures you from the very start. These composers for some inexplicable reasons have fallen from the performance platforms, some would say that that is simply due to the music being second rate, but this is pure hogwash. Some composers wrote so many pieces that the age old attitude of too many means a lack of skill or finesse is levelled at them hence they have been ignored, but remember that Haydn wrote 104 Symphonies, Mozart wrote 41 numbered, and a good deal of un-numbered, but that accusation is not levelled at these masters. They were part of the music scene of the period and their music stood or fell just as the lesser known names did at the time.

<https://youtu.be/NQEDRERW0Wc>

*Franz Anton Hoffmeister – Flute Concerto No.22 in G major – Allegro*

Getting over the prejudices we have been informed with or drilled into us is paramount to our own understanding and enjoyment of other composers works and in this period this is certainly necessary and the case. Do not bring pre-conceived ideas or thoughts to the table. Open the ears and enjoy a freshness of spirit.

Give the following list of composers a chance, you will be extremely surprised at what glorious music you have been missing out on.

- **Carl Philippe Emanuel Bach**
- **Johann Stamitz**
- **Franz Krommer**
- **Gioachino Rossini**
- **Jiri Benda**
- **Christian Cannabich**
- **Jean Baptiste Vanhall**
- **Josef Krauss**
- **Franz Anton Hoffmeister**
- **Carl Ditters von Dittersdorf**
- **Muzio Clementi**
- **Michael Haydn**
- **John Marsh**

- **Antonio Salieri**
- **Leopold Hoffmann**
- **Francoise Gossec**
- **Leopold Kozeluch**
- **Antonio Rosetti**

The period was one of great changes and developments in orchestras and their formal structuring. Chamber music (String Quartets and String Trios) really began to be heard and developed. The Sonata Form that was to dominate for over two centuries came into full force as a structuring technique. Opera came into its own with some composers concentrating on it as their main field of composition such as Rossini and Donizetti, as well as Salieri. Look beyond the usual fare and discover a whole new world full of delights. You will never look at this period of the “Age of Enlightenment” in quite the same way ever again. The list is certainly not extensive but does give a good overall example of the wonderful music to be encountered.

<https://youtu.be/hTmNb1p-so>

*Johann Stamitz – Symphony in D Major*