

The Classical Concerto

THE CONCERTO IN SUMMARY

In its most traditional form, as crystallised during the Classical Period, the Concerto is a large-scale work written for orchestra and soloist.

It combines the soloist's virtuosity and interpretive abilities with the orchestra's wide range of tone colour and dynamics.

It centres on the classical concept of balance; soloist and orchestra play equal roles, exchanging melodic lines taking turns in the spotlight. The soloist, however, is undeniably the star. The Concerto gives them an opportunity to showcase their technical prowess and musicality.

It usually comprises of three movements:

- I. **Fast.** Includes a cadenza near the end of the movement (**Concerto-Sonata form**)
- II. **Slow**, lyrical (variety of choices eg. Ternary, Theme and Variations, Rondo form)
- III. **Fast.** Sometimes a cadenza (Quick rondo or sonata-rondo form)

CONCERTO: SONATA FORM

Concerto-Sonata form is a modified version of Sonata form with two expositions.

The first is a short exposition which is played by orchestra only and both main themes are in the tonic. The second is a full exposition introducing the soloist. Themes follow typical modulation patterns of Sonata form.

There is also usually a **cadenza** for the soloist at the end of the movement. This is signified by a **fermata** and is an unaccompanied solo for the soloist to display their virtuosity. In the Classical Period, this was often an improvised solo and is not written into the score. The signal for the conductor and orchestra that the cadenza is drawing to a close is generally the use of a long trill and final note or chord that meshes with the reintroduction of the orchestra.

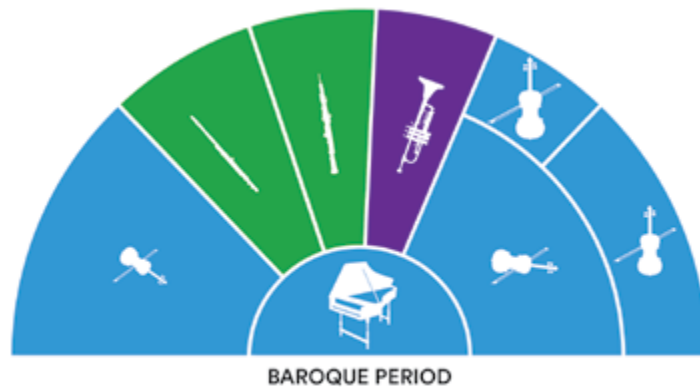
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BEGINNINGS: THE BAROQUE PERIOD CONCERTO (c.1600 - 1750)

Concerto is a term often applied in the 17th century to ensemble music for voices and instruments (Concertato style). Since then, it has usually denoted a work in which a solo instrument (or instrumental group) contrasts with an orchestral ensemble.

The **Concerto Grosso** is probably the most important type of Baroque concerto, characterised using a small group of solo instruments, called **concertino** or **principale**, against the full orchestra, called **ripieno** or **tutti**. These groups were underpinned by the Basso Continuo (sometimes referred to simply as Continuo).

The most influential and prolific composer of solo concertos during the Baroque period was the Venetian **Antonio Vivaldi (1678–1741)** and the most well-known composers of Concerti Grossi were **Arcangelo Corelli** and later, **JS Bach**.



Note: Orchestral layouts were not standardised in this era and there were many variations depending on the composer, location, and repertoire. This diagram gives some indication of the instrumentation. A Baroque Period Orchestra typically has between 10-30 players.

THE CLASSICAL PERIOD (c.1750 - 1820)

The Concerto is considered to have become fully established during the Classical Period.



Note: Orchestral layouts were not standardised in this era and there were many variations depending on the composer, location, and repertoire. This diagram gives some indication of the instrumentation. A Classical Orchestra can vary in size but typical works would call for between 30 to 60 players.

Classical Concerto

Emerging in the wake of the Enlightenment, the Classical Period prioritised reason, clarity, and artistic restraint. Composers like Mozart and Haydn, central figures of the Classical Period, crafted musical compositions that mirrored the intellectual and social ideals of the time. The quest for order and balance in music paralleled broader movements in governance and thought.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CLASSICAL CONCERTO (1750 - 1820)

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| COMPOSED FOR BENEFACTORS & MOVING TOWARDS PUBLIC CONCERTS | Concerti were plentiful as they were written as commissions or for a specific occasion for patrons and employers. Performances were generally at aristocratic residences but later, composers began to create their own performance opportunities through subscription concerts. |
| THE ROLE OF THE SOLOIST | The soloist's main role was to demonstrate their virtuosity and the development of new techniques on their instrument. They played an equal role with the orchestra. The soloist was usually known by the composer (or was the composer themselves). An improvised cadenza in the 1st movement (and occasionally the 3rd) gave the soloist an extra opportunity to demonstrate their technical prowess. |
| DURATION | 20-30 minutes |
| 3 MOVEMENTS. STANDARD FORMULA | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Fast. Concerto-Sonata form. 2. Slow and lyrical. Ternary or Theme and Variations form. 3. Fast and brilliant. Sonata or Sonata-Rondo form. |
| BALANCED & SYMMETRICAL MUSICAL PHRASES. REFINED & CONTROLLED FEELING | Classical Concerti were generally clearly structured and able to be understood by educated audiences on first hearing. Phrases were generally balanced with a sense of question and answer, and symphonies felt symmetrical with a clear structure. This contributed to the desired feeling of refinement and restraint in the music of the Classical Period. |
| STANDARDISED ORCHESTRA | String section is most prominent with Double Winds. Strings: 1st Violin, 2nd Violin, Viola, Cello and Double Bass. Woodwinds: 2 Flutes, 2 Oboes, 2 Clarinets, 2 Bassoons. Brass: 2 Trumpets, 2 French Horns. Percussion: 2 Timpani |
| TUNEFUL MELODIES | Easy to sing and recognise with balanced phrases. |
| HOMOPHONIC TEXTURE | Usually a melody with accompaniment. Texture could also be flexible, with some polyphonic sections within a movement. |
| VARIATION OF DYNAMICS | With the popularity of the Piano in the Classical period, composers added more crescendos and decrescendos. The range of dynamics stayed within a refined framework of <i>pp</i> to <i>ff</i> . |
| CONTRAST OF MOOD | Emotive elements were starting to develop in the Classical Concerto. This was always well controlled by the composers to ensure the work retained its refined and balanced feeling. The two main themes within the Sonata Form first movement generally had a contrasting mood. This was achieved through changes in harmony, instrumentation, rhythm, key, dynamics, and articulation. |
| METRE, TEMPO, & RHYTHM | Consistent metre and tempo within movements. |
| INFLUENTIAL COMPOSERS | Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven. |

The Development of the Concerto

SOCIAL, POLITICAL, CULTURAL BACKGROUND OF THE CLASSICAL PERIOD (1750 - 1820)

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| NEOCLASSICISM | Architects, composers, and artists sought to represent the clean lines, balanced structure and high ideals of the Ancient Greeks and Romans. |
| REVOLUTIONS | The French Revolution, American Revolution and Napoleonic Wars occurred during this era. This led to the decrease of power in the aristocracy and led to a larger, stronger Middle Class. |
| NEW MIDDLE CLASS | The Middle Class was earning more money and had greater power of influence in society. They organised public concerts which gave more people access to classical music outside of religious services or private homes. Until this time, access was restricted to the aristocracy as they regularly held palace concerts. |
| DEVELOPMENT OF THE FREELANCE COMPOSER | Due to the Middle Class having more money and time for culture and the Arts, composers were now more able to work as freelance composers, rather than for a Church or Aristocratic employer. Many of the Middle Class now learned musical instruments which led to a higher demand for compositions for amateur musicians. |