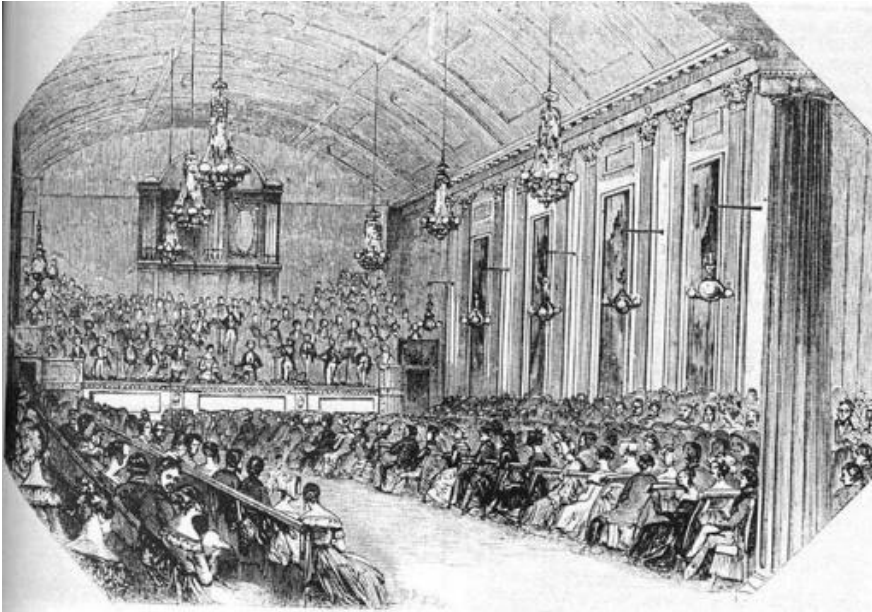


Haydn and the Classical Symphony

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Hanover Square Rooms in London, where Haydn gave concerts of his symphonies.

Historical context

In the mid-18th century, symphonies were typically used as background music, to accompany banquets or aristocratic entertainments. At the Brunswick court in northern Germany, the duchess played cards during the orchestral music, and she ordered the ensemble to play softly in a room with a thick carpet to deaden the sound.

In London, by contrast, symphonies were performed in public venues such as the Hanover Square Rooms (pictured above). Concerts were advertised in newspapers and attracted a paying audience. Haydn gave two concert series in London, in 1791–2 and 1794–5, for which he wrote his Symphonies nos. 93 to 104. At this point in his career, Haydn was one of the most celebrated musicians in Europe. Yet he still used musical novelty and arresting aural features to attract a London audience and hold their attention.

Key ideas

In his London Symphonies, Haydn created orchestral music of unprecedented length. **Four movements** were now the norm, with a minuet and trio as the third movement. Within each movement, Haydn established a musical journey by writing sections that sound **open** and require continuation. On a small scale this procedure can be heard in the phrase structure. Some phrases are open: they end with a weak cadence or in a different key, and therefore need to be followed by an answering phrase. Other phrases are closed, ending with a strong cadence in the home key. Haydn used a **hierarchy of cadences** of different strengths, which can be compared to different punctuation marks (full stop, comma, semi-colon, colon). Through careful weighting of the cadences, Haydn manipulated his listeners' expectations for how the music will unfold.

On a larger scale, Haydn built entire movements out of open or closed sections. The first movements of his symphonies use the **sonata principle**. Form is created via a structural modulation to a new key, which must resolve to the home key before the end. The exposition is an open section, usually modulating to the

dominant. The development is also open, owing to its tonal instability. Eventual closure comes in the recapitulation, where all the exposition material will usually be restated in the tonic.

To hold the attention of his audiences, Haydn used **surprise**, such as unpredictable harmonies, sudden sforzandos, or unexpected contrasts of themes. His London Symphonies also catered for a late 18th-century interest in the **sublime** (emotions and experiences beyond the ordinary). In art and literature, the sublime might be evoked by scenes of wild landscapes or overpowering storms. In his London Symphonies, Haydn conjured feelings of the sublime with the grandeur and mystery of his slow introductions, and with the overwhelming effect of tempestuous passages. In such efforts to give the symphony loftier meanings, Haydn sought to move the genre beyond mere entertainment.

Things to listen for

In the opening movements of his London Symphonies, Haydn used the **sonata principle**. He played with his listeners' expectations that the exposition would state a first subject in the tonic and then modulate to the dominant for a second subject. In **Symphony no.104** the opening movement is monothematic, with the same theme stated in the tonic and the dominant. Such an approach shows that sonata form is generated by the modulation to the dominant, regardless of how many themes are used. Elsewhere, Haydn experimented with creating motivic links between the different themes in an exposition: in Symphony no.101, the first and second subjects start with the same 6-8 rhythms for unaccompanied violins. Sometimes Haydn delayed the arrival of the second subject area, as in the Vivace of Symphony no.102. Here the music arrives at the dominant (bar 80), only for progress to be interrupted by fortissimo unison chords and a march-like figure in the relative minor of the dominant (bars 81–87).

Haydn started his first movements of his London Symphonies with **slow introductions**, creating a sense of grandeur or mystery associated with the sublime. Typically the introductions open the tonal space with a degree of ambiguity that will be resolved in the ensuing Allegro. **Symphony no.104** opens with bare fifths in D minor; the minor mode will be resolved in the D major Allegro, while the fifths delineate the interval that will be filled by rising quavers in the Allegro theme. **Symphony no.103** opens with a drum-roll, then a slow, sinuous melody for low strings and bassoon that evokes the plainsong *Dies irae*. Haydn brought these introductory ideas back in the recapitulation, commanding the listeners' attention before the return of the second subject.

In the **slow movements** of the London Symphonies, Haydn used surprise or special effects to engage his audience. In the Andante of **Symphony no.94 'Surprise'**, the prosaic opening theme is interrupted by a fortissimo tutti chord at the end of the second phrase. More subtle is the Andante of **Symphony no.104**, where the initial theme is extended through a subtle weighting of cadences and unexpected harmonic effects such as interrupted cadences (bars 2, 6, 18, 23, 29). Special effects occur in the Andante of **Symphony no.101 'The Clock'**, where the pizzicato quavers suggest a ticking clock. Other slow movements evoke the sublime in their sudden turns to the minor mode or fortissimo interjections on unexpected harmonies. The structure of slow movements may draw on elements of variation or ternary form, sometimes modified by the sonata principle. In Symphony no.104 the initial theme in G major is followed by variants in G minor and B flat major, before the opening returns in G major with additional solo adornments and tutti interjections.

Popular melodies are often evoked by Haydn, for instance in themes that suggest the folk music of central Europe. The finale of Symphony no.104 is based on a Croat folk song, with distinctive rhythms over a drone bass. The **minuet and trio** are an opportunity for shorter dance movements and light-hearted or comic effects. In the Trio of Symphony no.101, a delicate flute solo is heard over a tonic pedal in the strings, then interrupted by tutti outbursts with diminished 7th chords.

Broadened instrumentation is a characteristic of Haydn's London Symphonies, with a greater role for woodwind, brass and percussion. The flutes and oboes increasingly take themes by themselves, such as in **Symphony no.104** in the Allegro's recapitulation (to create variety when the same theme is stated twice in the tonic), and also in the Andante (bars 38, 114). Listen also for exposed woodwind writing in Symphony no.99 (Vivace assai, end of development; Adagio) and Symphony no.100 (Allegro, 1st subject). From Symphony no.99 onwards, Haydn added **clarinets** to the ensemble, although they do not have solo lines. Brass instruments and drums, previously used to reinforce tutti passages, are now used in their own right, notably in **Symphony no.103** with the **solo drum-roll** at its opening, and the exposed horn-calls at the start of its finale.

Legacy and reception

Haydn is sometimes called the 'father of the symphony', a nickname that overlooks the role of earlier musicians such as Johann Stamitz in shaping orchestral music at the Mannheim court. Haydn's achievement, however, was to increase the scope of the symphony, creating large-scale forms that held the interest of audiences and also evoked experiences beyond the concert hall. Many of Haydn's strategies were continued by Beethoven, whose First Symphony plays with listeners' expectations by starting with an apparent gesture of closure (a perfect cadence, albeit in a remote key). Beethoven's Third Symphony 'Eroica' expands the first movement to unprecedented lengths; and his Fifth Symphony takes Haydn's interest in motivic connections to new levels, by deploying a single motive across all four movements.

Orchestral interpretations of Haydn's symphonies have changed markedly since the 1980s. Historically informed performances by ensembles such as The Hanover Band, The Academy of Ancient Music, and London Classical Players used period instruments, giving a vibrant sound to the wind and brass, and favouring faster tempos and more vigorous articulation. These historically informed practices have now influenced mainstream orchestras, particularly in their choice of smaller ensemble sizes and livelier tempos.

Other resources

On the hierarchy of phrases and cadences in the Classical style, see Jan Willem Nelleke's [From Phrase to Phrasing: A Classical Perspective](#).

Further listening

Haydn, Symphony no.101 'The Clock'

Haydn, Symphony no.102

Haydn, Symphony no.103 'Drumroll'

Haydn, Symphony no.104

Beethoven, Symphony no.1

Beethoven, Symphony no.3 'Eroica'

Beethoven, Symphony no.5

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