

MAY FESTIVAL

Choral Music of the Classical Period

“Sanctus” from the Lord Nelson Mass, by F. J. Haydn

The Classical Period began around 1750, and gradually faded between 1820 and 1830. Composers moved away from the complex textures of the Baroque period and favored music in which a single melody is often predominant, the harmonies are simple, and the phrase lengths are regular and predictable. (The American and French Revolutions of this period are distantly related to these movements in the arts, which favored structures that were simpler, and more easily grasped.)

[0:00](#) Sanctus Dominus Deus Sabaoth

The music proceeds slowly in *homophonic* fashion, with all parts using similar or identical rhythms.

[1:22](#) Pleni sunt coeli et terra, Gloria tua

Suddenly the music changes meter and tempo. The rhythms are simple and clear, and the harmonies are straightforward (notice how few *accidentals* are in the music – very few added sharps or flats beyond the key signature.) In most cases, the music is in “4-bar phrases.” Listen carefully, and notice that every four measures, the music sounds like it starts over.

Notice that the orchestra is very active, and very independent, generating energy around some relatively simple choral parts.

[1:47](#) Osanna in excelsis

The texture changes for moment, allowing individual voice parts to step out, before returning to the homophonic sounds heard previously. Notice that melodic ideas are

repeated with only simple changes, as compared to the complicated evolution usually heard in Baroque Music.

More Classical Period choral videos:

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