After the death of Prince Esterházy in 1790, Haydn was invited to perform in London, where he composed his last twelve symphonies. In the London symphonies, which he wrote for an orchestra of some sixty players, he explored an expanded harmonic range and a wealth of dramatic effects. For some of the symphonies he used folk melodies as basic themes, inventively repeating key fragments in different parts of the piece. Among the most memorable of the London symphonies is No. 94, nicknamed “The Surprise” because Haydn introduced an unexpected fortissimo (“very loud”) instrumental crash on a weak beat in the second movement of the piece. Tradition has it that the blaring chord was calculated to waken a drowsy audience—London concerts often lasted well past midnight—and entice them to anticipate the next “surprise,” which never does occur. Haydn brought a lifetime of musical experience to his last works. Their witty phrasing and melodic effects made these symphonies enormously popular—so popular, in fact, that eighteenth-century music publishers often sold compositions that they falsely attributed to Haydn. A celebrity in his old age, “Papa Haydn” (as he was affectionately called) was one of the first musicians to attain the status of a culture hero during his own lifetime.

### The Genius of Mozart

The foremost musical genius of the eighteenth century—and, some would say, of all time—was Haydn’s younger contemporary and colleague, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791). A child prodigy, Mozart wrote his first original composition at the age of six and his first symphony at the age of eight. His ability to sight read, improvise, and transpose music, to identify the pitch of any sound, and to transcribe flawlessly whole compositions that he had heard only once, remains unequalled in the history of music. During his brief life, Mozart produced a total of some 650 works, including 41 symphonies, 60 sonatas, 23 piano concertos, 70 string quartets, and 20 operas.

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**Figure 26.35** Sonata form.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SECTION</th>
<th>EXPOSITION</th>
<th>DEVELOPMENT</th>
<th>RECAPITULATION</th>
<th>CODA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>THEME</td>
<td>first theme</td>
<td>first and second themes developed</td>
<td>first theme</td>
<td>second theme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>second theme</td>
<td></td>
<td>bridge</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TONALITY</td>
<td>home key</td>
<td>contrasting keys</td>
<td>home key</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>second key</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*See Music Listening Selections at end of chapter.*
(These were catalogued and numbered in the late nineteenth century by Ludwig von Köchel, hence the “K.” numbers used to identify Mozart’s compositions.)

Wolfgang, the son of a prominent composer, was born in Salzburg, Austria. With his father, Leopold, and his sister Nannerl, he toured Europe, performing hundreds of public and private concerts before he was thirteen (Figure 26.36). He often performed his own pieces, particularly his piano concertos, which constitute some of his most important musical contributions. Unlike Haydn, Mozart did not invent any new forms. However, he brought to the instrumental genres of his time unparalleled melodic inventiveness. He borrowed melodies from popular dance tunes and transformed them into elegant compositions appropriate for garden parties, weddings, and balls. One such piece is the Serenade in G Major, K.525, also known as “Eine kleine Nachtmusik” (“A Little Night Music”), a work for small string orchestra. He incorporated popular melodies into his symphonies as well, three of which (K.543, K.550, and K.551) were written in a six-week period in 1788. These pieces remain among the most eloquent examples of the classical symphonic form.

After leaving the service of the Archbishop of Salzburg in 1781, Mozart sought appointments in the aristocratic courts of Europe, but he never received adequate patronage and had difficulty supporting himself and his family. Throughout his life, he was excessively concerned with money; when he died in Vienna at the age of thirty-six, he was buried in a pauper’s grave. During the last six years of his life, Mozart wrote four of his finest operas, receiving commissions for all but the first. These works are among the best loved in the Western operatic repertory: Le nozze di Figaro (The Marriage of Figaro, 1786), Don Giovanni (1787), Così fan tutte (Thus Do All Women, 1790), and Die Zauberflöte (The Magic Flute, 1791).

The Marriage of Figaro is an example of opera buffa, a type of comic opera that developed during the eighteenth century as a short, humorous entertainment. Formerly inserted between the acts of a serious play or opera, these intermezzi made use of stock, comic types such as the clever servant, the miser, and the fool. Like the playwright Molière (see chapter 21), Mozart transformed the stock characters of the Italian opera buffa into psychologically penetrating personalities. At the same time, he leveled a pointed attack on the decadence of the European aristocracy. Indeed, Mozart would have shared Molière’s view that wealth and status are accidents of fortune, rather than marks of personal worth. The central intrigue of Figaro involves the maid Susanna and her fiancé, the valet Figaro, in a plot to outwit their master Count Almaviva, who seeks to seduce Susanna. In an era dominated by aristocratic privilege, and one that still honored the feudal claim to “first-night rights” over a female servant, The Marriage of Figaro was unique; it championed the wit and ingenuity of the lower class (and especially the females of that class) over the self-serving arrogance of the nobility. And while such a theme might seem less than controversial today, it stirred heated debate in Mozart’s time—Napoleon called the play by Pierre-Augustin Beaumarchais (1732–1799), on which the opera was based, “revolution already in action.” Certainly Mozart was more interested in music than in political reform—he agreed to temper Beaumarchais’ scolding satire by way of Lorenzo da Ponte’s Italian libretto. But his scorn for the upper classes—perhaps stemming from his own personal difficulties with aristocratic patrons—is readily apparent in the piece.

Politics aside, the enduring beauty of The Marriage of Figaro lies in its lyrical force and its expressive ingenuity. Mozart had a special talent for shaping personalities by way of music. While the characters in the operas of Monteverdi and Lully were allegorical stick figures, Mozart’s appeal to us as real human beings. They convey a wide range of human expression, from grief and despair to hope and joy. Mozart’s vocal music is never sentimental; it retains the precision and clarity of the classical style and invests it with unparalleled melodic grace. Only by listening to Mozart’s music can one appreciate the reason why Haydn called him “the greatest composer known to me either in person or by name.”

Beethoven: The Early Years

Generally considered the third of the great classical composers, Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827) spanned the era between the classical and romantic styles in music. Born in Bonn, in northern Germany, Beethoven spent the greater part of his life in Vienna, where he studied briefly with Haydn. His earliest works, mainly keyboard pieces composed between 1782 and 1792, reveal his debt to Mozart, as well as his facility with classical form and style. Between 1793 and 1803, his first years in Vienna, Beethoven made his name as a virtuoso pianist, a composer of piano pieces, and a master of the string quartet. By 1799, however, he began to break with the more formal aspects of classical music. By the turn of the century, his compositions, which include the first two of his nine symphonies, would anticipate the tension and vigor, the emphasis on rhythm rather than melody, and the forceful instrumental language that would stretch classical form, and, ultimately, challenge the classical style (see chapter 29).

SUMMARY

Eighteenth-century European art and music reflected the changing character and tastes of its various social classes. The fashionable rococo style reflected the aristocratic affection for ornamental delicacy, intimacy, and playful elegance. This style dominated the salons of Paris and the courts and churches of Austria and Germany. In France, Watteau, Boucher, Vigée-Lebrun, Fragonard, and Clodion produced art that evoked a world of physical pleasure and sensuous delight.

4 See Music Listening Selections at end of chapter.

*For a fascinating interpretation of Mozart’s life, see the play Amadeus by Peter Shaffer (New York: Harper and Row, 1981) and the Academy Award-winning film version of the play produced in 1984.