

# Symphony

## By Peggy DiMercurio



Philosopher and novelist Colin Wilson once said, “A symphony is a stage play with the parts written for instruments instead of for actors.”

The word “symphony” evokes thoughts of powerful, sweeping music written by the masters - Beethoven, Bach, Mozart and Haydn, but “it was originally relegated to a humble position as the introductory music for an opera. Symphonies became so popular in the 18<sup>th</sup> century that they detached completely from opera and turned into the most revered instrumental genre of the era,” according to Emma Riggle on Study.com. “Sinfonias,” from which symphonies descended, were written to be played by an orchestra or woodwinds and strings in the opening overtures of 17<sup>th</sup> century Italian operas. They were written in three movements - a fast first movement, a slow second movement and a fast third movement.

As they gained in popularity throughout the Classical period, they moved from the aristocratic, elite opera houses to public concert venues in Europe and reached a broader audience of middle-class concert goers. The word “symphony” comes from the Greek word “symphonia,” which means an “agreement of concord of sound” and can refer to both the musical piece played by an orchestra as well as the orchestra that plays the music. While Classical-period symphonies were written in three movements for an orchestra without singers, later symphonies occasionally included soloists and choruses. As symphonies grew in popularity, composers began to write them with four movements, opening with the sonata. The symphony orchestras grew as well to include four main types of instruments: the woodwinds, strings, brass and percussion played by 30 – 100 musicians.

To be determined a “symphony” a work has to maintain a “certain degree of sophistication and seriousness of purpose.” (2) Composers continue to write symphonies and symphony orchestras continue to engage audiences throughout the world with 1,200 orchestras in the U.S. alone. Orchestras are also found in Europe, Canada, South America, Asia, India, Australia, New Zealand, the Caribbean, Russia and the Middle East.

### Sources

<https://study.com/academy/lesson/the-symphony-history-parts-and-function-in-society.html>

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Symphony>