

AQA AoS1: Mozart Clarinet Concerto

KS4

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AQA GCSE Area of Study 1: Western classical tradition 1650-1910

The third movement of Mozart's Clarinet Concerto in A, K622 is a study piece for AQA's GCSE Area of Study 1. The study of this piece will allow students to study not only the Classical style, but also the clarinet as an instrument. The study of this piece will involve considering how Mozart wrote for the orchestra and also the clarinet, a relatively new instrument at the time.

Alongside his 1791 Clarinet Concerto, Mozart also composed music for horn, flute, oboe and bassoon. These pieces will provide useful examples of wider listening that will support the understanding of the study piece.

This study piece will be examined in Section B of the Understanding Music paper, and there will be three short questions of two marks, followed by a longer answer question worth eight marks. In the exam, the question from Area of Study 1 is compulsory in Section B, but then students have a choice of one other question from the other areas.

Understanding Mozart

How can we get to grips with Mozart's composing style and approach? In the AQA specification it says that:

'Students must be able to listen attentively to unfamiliar music from all four areas of study to identify and accurately describe musical elements, musical contexts and use musical language (including staff notation).'

It also states that the critical appraisal of the music involves using the knowledge and understanding of:

- ▶ The effect of audience, time and place on how the study pieces were created, developed and performed.
- ▶ How and why the music across the selected areas of study has changed over time.
- ▶ How the composer's purpose and intention for the study pieces is reflected in their use of musical elements.
- ▶ Relevant musical vocabulary and terminology for the study pieces.

When it comes to understanding Mozart, a good place to start is simply listening to his music – and what a back catalogue he left us with. As we listen to his music, we can consider the musical elements and how he used them, the different genres that he embraced, and the way he used musical language.

The AQA specification contains a list of musical elements that students are required to know and understand. Understanding musical elements starts with being able to define and explain each term. Looking up definitions in a music dictionary is helpful, but it is also important to be able to spot the elements in a piece of music.

A useful approach to understanding musical language is to follow along to listening with musical scores. The International Music Score Library Project (<https://imslp.org>) is a very helpful website that provides free downloads of scores. Using this website will ensure that the elements are being brought to life and we start to really understand the musical language used by Mozart.

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Understanding Mozart tasks

Here are some tasks and questions that students can complete in their pursuit of understanding Mozart:

- 1 Create a timeline of key musical moments in Mozart's life.
- 2 Summarise Mozart in five pieces: which five pieces would you choose to define Mozart as a composer?
- 3 As an audience member in Mozart's time, what would have been the most exciting, shocking and innovative features of the composer's music?
- 4 How did Mozart's music change over the course of his life?
- 5 Can you compose like Mozart? Compose a short melody in the style of Mozart for an orchestra commonly used in the Classical period.
- 6 Take a famous tune by Mozart and use it as the basis for a theme and variations composition that explores the Classical style.
- 7 Imagine you are at a concert in 1791. Write a review of that concert and consider the impact the music would have had on the audience. Some careful research might mean that you can find an actual programme for a concert that Mozart conducted at that time.
- 8 Record and create a podcast that celebrates the life of Mozart. Select suitable extracts of music and interview other students and staff.
- 9 Undertake some wider reading to support your students. Research Mozart and how he became the composer that we know. Find out the influences on his life and how his style developed.

The Classical style

Mozart, Haydn and Beethoven are three of the biggest names in the Classical era. Not only did they compose a huge volume of music, but they also pioneered new genres and approaches that are still studied by us today. The Classical style is something that we need to get to grips with if we're going to fully understand the music of Mozart.

So what is the Classical style? This is a big question and one that students should explore as they study the orchestral music of Mozart, Haydn and Beethoven. There are, however, some key features of the style:

- ▶ The music is often described as elegant, balanced and lyrical.
- ▶ The Classical style tends to lean towards homophonic textures with clear melodies.
- ▶ During the Classical period, sonata form became the common structure for use in symphonies.
- ▶ The Classical style relies on a larger orchestra than the Baroque period with wider use of woodwind instruments and the phasing out of the harpsichord.
- ▶ The Classical style saw the development and wider use of the piano.

Unfamiliar music

The AQA specification states that students need to listen to unfamiliar orchestral music by Mozart, Haydn and Beethoven. It can be hard to know where to start when there's so much music to listen to. Haydn composed 106 symphonies, Mozart 41 and Beethoven 9. Haydn composed 68 string quartets, Mozart 26 and Beethoven 16. It would be impossible to listen to everything – although that would be an excellent way to understand their music.

Having a listening plan can be very helpful for unfamiliar listening. This plan can then be followed across the course, and playlists on Spotify, Apple Music or YouTube can be a helpful way of keeping track of it. Picking a handful of symphonies by Haydn and maybe the first and last by Mozart and Beethoven might be a good place to start. It's also helpful to pick symphonies where you can find out a little bit about what exactly is going on musically. There are some superb resources available that can help with this:

- 1 *The Listening Service* podcast by Tom Service (www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/bo78n25h): Service discusses not only pieces of music, but also some of the achievements, advances and questions related to music history. This is a very enjoyable podcast, and a great way to discover music.
- 2 *The Guardian 50 Greatest Symphonies* (www.theguardian.com/music/series/50-greatest-symphonies): there's a huge wealth of information on this site, and it's an ideal place to find out information about symphonies. The list includes Beethoven's Symphonies Nos 3 and 6, Mozart's Symphony No. 41 and Haydn's Symphony No. 102 – along with many more.
- 3 BBC Radio 3 *Record Review* (www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/bo6w2121): another website full of very useful broadcast recordings that cover a range of composers and pieces.
- 4 BBC Radio 3 *Composer of the Week* (www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/zFvDWTYSIVmCstDqysLccTy/discovering-the-great-composers): though similar to the website above, this focuses more on the composers themselves, but also includes valuable information about their music.

The Clarinet



The clarinet was invented around 1700 and is a single-reed woodwind instrument. It has a rich, warm, mellow, round sound to it. However, it also has the ability at the higher end of its range to sound more shrill, penetrating and bright. It's an instrument with a range of around four octaves, although the exact pitch range will differ depending on the specific clarinet. There are in fact ten different types of clarinet, but the most common two are the clarinet in B flat and the one in A. The smaller E flat clarinet and the much larger bass clarinet are also widely used. An orchestral player will be expected to have both a B flat and an A clarinet, since they are both commonly used in orchestral repertoire.

Getting to know the clarinet should start with listening, and there are some illuminating examples of the use of the different clarinets mentioned above:

- ▶ Brahms: Symphony No. 3 (opening of second movement) – B flat clarinet
- ▶ Beethoven: Symphony No. 6 *Pastoral* (middle of second movement) – B flat clarinet
- ▶ Berlioz: *Symphonie fantastique* – E flat clarinet
- ▶ Mahler: Symphony No. 1 – E flat clarinet
- ▶ Mahler: Symphony No. 6 (first movement) – bass clarinet
- ▶ Tchaikovsky: 'Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy' from *The Nutcracker* – bass clarinet

There is also an informative video about the clarinet produced by the Philharmonia Orchestra (<https://tinyurl.com/mskwwdnj>). This will provide some added insight into the clarinet and how it's used in orchestral music:

When Mozart composed this Concerto in 1791, it was probably written for an early form of clarinet known as a basset horn or basset clarinet. Today, it is more likely to be performed on a modern clarinet in A. More information on the history of the piece can be found in the AQA teaching guide (https://filestore.aqa.org.uk/resources/music/AQA-8271-TEACHER-GUIDE_AOS1.PDF).

Mozart's Clarinet Concerto in A, K622 (third movement)

There's a vast amount we could discuss when it comes to this movement. Here we will focus on three areas that link nicely to the discussion of the Classical style. The teaching guide provided by AQA is not only extensive but also offers a depth that will more than satisfy any GCSE music student. It's important always to keep in mind that truly understanding the music is often achieved through listening. It's also true to say that good analysis of a piece comes when we link musical features to the context of the piece. The structure, harmony, tonality and melody presented here by Mozart are good indicators of the era of composition.

Structure

Mozart uses a rondo form for the fast third movement. This was a popular choice in the Classical period, and it allows Mozart to keep returning to a key musical idea or motif. This is very much in keeping with the sense of balance and order consistently used in the period.

The rondo theme in the third movement is in 6/8 time and can be broken down into two four-bar phrases – again in keeping with the sense of balance. The first four bars can be referred to as the antecedent, or the question. The subsequent four bars are therefore the consequent, the answer to the question. These ideas are then heard in the orchestral accompaniment, albeit in a slightly modified form:

The image displays two staves of musical notation in 6/8 time, key of A major (two sharps). The first staff is labeled 'Four Bar Phrase - Antecedent' and contains four measures of music. The second staff is labeled 'Four Bar Phrase - Consequent' and also contains four measures of music. The notation includes various rhythmic values such as eighth and sixteenth notes, rests, and slurs, illustrating the balanced structure of the rondo theme.

Harmony and tonality

The music above shows another key feature of the piece, and another example of the Classical style. It's not only the structure that's balanced, but also the use of harmony. The first four-bar phrase begins in the tonic and ends in the dominant. The response (or consequent) also begins in the tonic, but this time ends in the tonic too – A major. This sense of harmonic phrasing is linked with the idea of balanced phrases. The diatonic harmony itself is another common feature of the Classical era.

Another harmonic feature of the piece is the use of clear cadences that help to mark the end of phrases. This was a common approach in the Classical period, and it gave the music that elegant and balanced sound. A good example of a perfect cadence can be heard in bar 42 of the orchestra accompaniment.

As we would expect for a piece composed in the Classical era, Mozart uses closely related keys that he's able to modulate to through the use of cadences and transition passages. Mozart moves the music to the relative minor of F sharp minor in bar 138, coinciding with the start of the second episode. His tonalities and harmonies are clear and highly Classical.

Melody

The melody composed by Mozart for the clarinet is an ideal example of a Classical melody. As discussed above, the phrases are balanced and elegant in their style. They are also heavily rooted in harmony, with clear cadential figures, scalar runs and movement to closely related keys. The rondo form helps us to get to know the clarinet motifs really well, and you quickly start to recognise the structure and layout of the melodies.

Mozart also uses this approach to melody in the orchestral accompaniment. We see frequent use of scalar passages in the orchestra as well as the use of sequences (for example, bar 31), another key feature of the Classical style. In bar 57, we see a shift in the melody as Mozart introduces his first episode. The melody here shows the full use of the clarinet as it incorporates a descending semiquaver run down to the lower end of its range. The same melody from bar 57 is then heard again in bar 65, this time down two octaves. This lower register is known as the chalumeau register, and covers the range from the clarinet's low E to the B flat above middle C. This is the opposite to the altissimo or top register of the instrument: A clarinet is able to reach a C four octaves above middle C.

There are some wonderful chromatic moments to the clarinet melody in bars 107 and 109. Such an approach was not uncommon, and again shows how versatile and exciting Mozart's melodies are. These moments add lovely colours to the solo part.

Mozart not only writes lyrical melodies for the solo clarinet but also provides some more virtuosic and exciting passages. Bars 208 to 213 show one example of this more virtuosic approach, and provide an insight into the way concertos will develop in the future. A concerto provides an opportunity to showcase not only an instrument but also a musician. Before composing this concerto, Mozart had written a Clarinet Quintet for his friend Anton Stadler, a highly regarded virtuoso clarinetist of the time. It's fascinating to think of Mozart writing music for someone he knew to give them a chance to show off their skills, and interesting to consider Stadler giving Mozart feedback on how he could make the clarinet writing more exciting, virtuosic or lyrical.

Assessment

The AQA GCSE music exam is split into two sections. Section A is based on unfamiliar listening, and Section B focuses on the four areas of study:

- 1 Western classical tradition 1650–1910
- 2 Popular music
- 3 Traditional music
- 4 Western classical tradition since 1910

In section A, the questions cover the full range of musical elements. Students are required to identify features in an extract of music such as instrumentation, tonality and time signatures. They are also asked to suggest how the music may be typical of a certain style or structure common to the area of study.

When studying for the Mozart question, any unfamiliar listening work will help students to prepare for section A, and they should always be thinking about the styles, structures and genres that could be used. A question could feature anything from Baroque to Romantic music.

In section B, students are required to answer question 9 and then one other from questions 10 to 12. Question 9 is where the Mozart set work features, and it is compulsory for students to answer. This then leaves the options of answering a question on either popular music, traditional music, or the Western classical tradition since 1910.

Question 9 includes four parts. Three of them are worth two marks, and the final question is worth eight marks. Here are some possible two-mark questions:

- 1 Identify two other woodwind instruments used in the orchestra for this piece.
- 2 What is the sounding pitch of the final two notes in the clarinet solo?
- 3 Identify two harmonic features of the rondo movement.
- 4 Identify two melodic features of the orchestral interlude starting at bar 31.
- 5 Name two different ornaments used in the third movement.
- 6 Identify two ways in which Mozart emphasises the structure.

The final, eight-mark question requires more detail on the piece and is likely to focus on how particular elements of music are used. Students are effectively being asked to explain how Mozart uses three or four elements of music within the rondo movement, for example harmony, tonality and texture. These elements, however, are linked to an overarching feature such as the Classical style or sense of balance in the piece.

Let's consider a possible eight-mark question:

Explain how Mozart has used instrumentation, harmony, rhythm and melody to create a sense of 'elegance' in the third movement of his Clarinet Concerto in A, K622.

This question focuses on the idea of 'elegance', and students need to look at how the four musical elements are used to convey that idea. Elegance is often achieved through balance and structure – the Classical style shines throughout the piece. Students may therefore touch on:

- ▶ The use of a smaller than usual Classical orchestra. This helps to support the clarinet since there are no horns, oboes or timpani. Elegance is achieved by the combination of the orchestral colours and the timbre of the clarinet.
- ▶ Elegance is achieved through the use of clear diatonic, functional harmony throughout the third movement. Phrases are marked by clear cadences and movement to closely related keys.
- ▶ There is a sense of elegance in the use of rhythm, since Mozart tends to re-use rhythmic ideas and patterns throughout the movement. The movement also features the use of anacrusis to help establish phrases on both the solo clarinet and in the orchestra.
- ▶ There is a clear sense of elegance in Mozart's melodies through the use of conjunct and scalar patterns. The melodies are repeated and the use of devices such as sequences and repetition help to establish them firmly in your mind. The way Mozart shapes the melodies and contrasts the semiquaver runs and the more lyrical episodic moments leads to a clear sense of Classical elegance and balance. There is a clear distinction between the semiquaver runs and the passages that are more dominated by crotchets and quavers.
- ▶ The clarinet as an instrument has a sense of elegance due to its warm tone. It is also able to play across a wide range, offering a warm lower register that is pleasing to the ear. Alongside this, the clarinet is able to play at a higher register, which although more shrill, is not necessarily always piercing, but clear and distinguishable. The use of the chalumeau register is also important to mention when discussing the elegance of the clarinet.
- ▶ The use of strings in the orchestra also creates a sense of elegance in the music. The orchestra has a clear role, and the strings are able to use a variety of effects such as arco, double-stopping and tremolo that give a sense of style and support the clarinet. Mozart creates an elegant mood by carefully combining the orchestral forces and the solo clarinet.

More music for clarinet

There are numerous examples of music for clarinet, but some notable examples are:

- ▶ Weber: Clarinet Concerto No. 2 in E flat
- ▶ Finzi: Five Bagatelles
- ▶ Brahms: Clarinet Sonata No. 2
- ▶ Poulenc: Sonata for Clarinet and Piano
- ▶ Bernstein: Sonata for Clarinet and Piano

Conclusion

Mozart's Clarinet Concerto is widely considered to be one of his most famous and popular works. Not only does he explore the instrument itself, but he also provides a useful example of a Classical concerto. His writing for clarinet and orchestra typify the Classical style and show Mozart's unique ability to compose memorable melodies. Success in the exam will come from knowing both Mozart's music and the style of the Classical era. The clarinet itself has stood the test of time, and has been used ever since 1791 in a range of styles and genres that make it an exciting and versatile woodwind instrument.