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R O Y A L
C O L L E G E
O F M U S I C
London

Royal College of Music Museum

Western Classical Music - KS3 & 4
Clarinet Pack

The classical clarinet

Classical music (1750 – c1810) tends to sound quite simple compared to the busy texture of baroque music.

The music is much more melody-dominated, with a homophonic texture which is based on chords. The instruments playing the harmony parts tend to move together. Around this time in history, instruments were changing and the orchestra grew slightly larger.



The clarinet was an exciting new instrument when it was invented around the year 1690. It is a member of the woodwind family.

Why was it invented?

Baroque composers like Bach and Handel kept writing very high parts for trumpets, but trumpeters found them difficult to play. The clarinet (which means 'little trumpet' in Italian) could play these parts more easily.

Famous classical composer, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart helped the clarinet to become a big success by writing two pieces in which the clarinet was the star instrument.

By the time Ludwig van Beethoven was composing, clarinets had become a standard part of the woodwind section in the classical orchestra.

Can you spot the clarinets in this video?



WATCH: RCM Classical Orchestra: Mozart, Symphony no 31 'Paris'
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B366A-28cj4>

Ivory clarinet by George Heinrich Scherer (c.1730)

This unique clarinet (below left) is on display in the Royal College of Music Museum.



This clarinet is particularly special. Not only is it very old, but it is made out of a rare, precious material. Ivory! It would have been very expensive to make, and very delicate.

When the clarinet was first invented, it looked very simple compared to the modern clarinets we know today.

Can you see the differences between them?

Besides the material they are made out of, the main difference is the number of keys. The ivory clarinet on the left only has two keys and otherwise looks quite a lot like a recorder. As the clarinet developed, more keys were added which meant clarinettists could play more chromatic notes.

