Your notes

GCSE Music: revision notes

The concerto through time

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The Baroque concerto (1600 to 1750)

- A **concerto** contrasts a soloist (or a small group) with an orchestra. Most have three movements: fast, slow, fast.
- The **concerto grosso** sets a small group of soloists (the **concertino**) against the full string orchestra (the **ripieno** or tutti). Composers: Corelli, Handel, Bach.
- The solo **concerto** has one soloist, often a violin. Vivaldi wrote hundreds, including The Four Seasons.
- Baroque features: **ritornello** form (the orchestra's main theme keeps coming back between solo sections), **basso continuo** (harpsichord and cello playing the bass and chords), terraced dynamics (sudden changes between loud and soft) and sequences.

The Classical concerto (1750 to 1810)

- One soloist, often piano, violin or clarinet, with a bigger orchestra that now includes woodwind, horns and timpani. The harpsichord continuo disappears.
- Melodies are balanced and elegant, in clear four-bar phrases, with simple harmony and Alberti bass.
- The first movement is in sonata form with a double exposition: the orchestra plays the themes first, then the soloist plays them again.
- Near the end of the first movement there is a **cadenza**: the orchestra stops and the soloist shows off alone. Composers: Mozart and Haydn.

The Romantic concerto (1810 to 1910)

- The soloist is a star **virtuoso**, playing very fast, difficult music against a large orchestra with more brass and percussion.
- The music is emotional and dramatic: wide range of dynamics, **rubato** (speeding up and slowing down for expression), chromatic harmony and long, singing melodies.

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- **Cadenzas** are often written out by the composer, and movements may run into each other. Composers: Mendelssohn, Tchaikovsky, Grieg and Rachmaninov.
- Across all three periods, listen for how the soloist and orchestra take turns, answer each other and play together.

Your notes

Key terms

Concerto	A piece for a soloist (or small group) and orchestra.
Concerto grosso	A Baroque concerto for a small group of soloists and orchestra.
Concertino	The small group of soloists in a concerto grosso.
Ripieno	The full orchestra in a concerto grosso (also called the tutti).
Ritornello	A main theme that keeps returning between solo sections.
Basso continuo	The harpsichord and cello part that plays the bass and chords in Baroque music.
Cadenza	A showy passage for the soloist alone.
Virtuoso	A performer with outstanding technical skill.
Rubato	Pushing and pulling the tempo for expression.

Quick questions

Cover the answers and test yourself: remembering is what makes it stick.

1. What is a concerto?
2. What is the concertino in a concerto grosso?
3. Which composer wrote The Four Seasons?
4. What is ritornello form?
5. What plays the basso continuo in Baroque music?
6. What is a cadenza?
7. What is a double exposition?
8. Which period has the largest orchestras and star virtuoso soloists?

Answers

1. A piece for a soloist or small group with an orchestra
2. The small group of soloists
3. Vivaldi
4. The orchestra's main theme keeps returning between solo sections
5. Harpsichord and cello
6. A showy passage for the soloist alone
7. The orchestra plays the themes first, then the soloist plays them again
8. Romantic

What to do next

Practise 10 questions on this topic

Try 3 exam questions, with mark schemes

Read the lesson, one step at a time

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