

The late Baroque

Extract 1 – From the Renaissance to the Baroque

(adapted from Schulenberg (2001), *Music of the Baroque*, OUP.)

The noun *Renaissance* originally referred to the rediscovery of ancient Greek and Roman literature by fifteenth-century scholars, whereas the word *Baroque* is an adjective referring to what were thought to be overly elaborate forms of art in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. In music we tend to apply both terms to slightly later periods than other historians: roughly 1450-1600 for the Renaissance, 1600 to 1750 for the Baroque. ... It would be a mistake to think of music from 1600-1750 as constituting a single Baroque style that is entirely distinct from that of the Renaissance; there is great diversity within both periods. (pp. 1-2)

Some changes around 1600 – things that are different in Baroque music compared to Renaissance (pp: 40 ff.):

- **More distinct genres** of composition – new vocal genres and new types of instrumental music such as the sonata and the concerto
- Composers began writing for **specific instruments** and developed idiomatic styles of composition suited to each of the commonly used instruments, including increasing emphasis on **solo virtuosity**
- Composers also began to **write out melodic embellishments** rather than leaving instrumentalists to improvise it.
- In the early Baroque there was an increase in striking dissonances but there was a more important and longer-lasting **shift from modal writing to modern tonality**
- The widespread **adoption of basso continuo** – the use of a melodic bass instrument such as the cello playing the bass line with the addition of a keyboard instrument (or lute) filling in the harmonies

Extract 2 – The terms Baroque and Classical

(adapted from Taruskin (2008), *Music in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, OUP.)

The adjective *baroque* was first applied to music in the eighteenth century as a pejorative term. The adjective *classical* was first applied in the 1830s after they were all dead. Their being dead was part of what made them “Classical” but in every other way the term is misleading.

Rather than using the term Baroque, thinking about the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries as the period of the *basso continuo* has several advantages: it focuses attention on harmony, the element that saw the most radical development in the form of major-minor tonality; secondly, the use of tonality allowed the development of the large-scale forms that helped to drive the rise of (abstract) instrumental music’s dominance over vocal music (pp. xxi-xxii).

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Extract 3 – The Baroque Instrumental concerto

(adapted from Schulenberg (2001), *Music of the Baroque*, OUP.)

The instrumental concertos of the late Baroque by Bach, Handel, and Vivaldi are probably the best known products of the entire period. In the late Baroque the term concerto describes works for one or more instrumental soloists and orchestra, usually with a virtuoso element and of relatively ambitious dimensions.

In **Corelli's** Concerti Grossi, following a tradition that seems to have arisen in the 1660s in Rome, passages for a small solo chamber ensemble (Trio sonata forces of two violins, cello and harpsichord) alternate with ones in which they are joined by a larger string section (the ripieno), who simply double up the solo parts. Corelli's concertos became famous in the 1690s but were not published until 1714.

By this time, other types of concerto were becoming more fashionable. These new concertos provided greater opportunities for virtuoso display by the soloists and frequently by the ensemble as a whole as well. The increasing emphasis on soloistic expression paralleled developments in opera ... with the soloist playing a role similar to that of the virtuoso singer.

The new types of concerto borrowed elements of the operatic aria, including the use of **ritornello** form. This involved an alternation between passages scored for the entire ensemble (tutti) and more lightly scored passages involving one or more soloists accompanied by continuo (solo). The same music returns each time for the tutti passages, hence the term ritornello. Ritornello form involves more than just an alternation between tutti and soloist. Equally crucial is the presence of modulations, so that each ritornello is usually in a different key, the first and last in the tonic. Most of the modulations take place during the solos, so that the opening of each ritornello serves as a point of arrival. In other words, the ritornellos are the main guideposts or pillars of the movement.

The Baroque composer **Vivaldi** wrote a series of concertos in the early 1700s that were very influential on later composers. His best works are characterized by inventive writing for individual instruments as well as clever and varied use of ensemble as a whole. Many works also contain harmonic and rhythmic surprises that may be witty and dramatic at the same time. The frequent repetitions and sequences can make the music seem simple, yet, as with Corelli, the impression of simplicity is actually an indication of its sophistication. From Vivaldi's music, Bach, and other composers, learnt how to produce vivid, dramatic effects without indulging in the complex counterpoint or chromatic harmony of earlier Baroque composers. In this we see the beginning of the development towards the Classical style of the late eighteenth century. (pp. 292 ff.)