

1600 – 1750 THE BAROQUE ERA

The 1600s saw the rise of instrumental music as composers explored techniques and new instrumental forms. Monarchs built palaces where composers and musicians worked in orchestras, choirs, and opera companies. City governments also joined the courts and churches as centers for music and culture. The public was able to hear secular music at these events and enjoyed hearing the works of local contemporary composers. The Protestant church and the chorale was important as the reformation had a major effect on church music. The **sonata** and **concerto** were born during this period, and growing virtuosity of performance emerged to accompany these forms. Keyboard music flourished, specifically for **harpsichord**. The Baroque era also saw the dawning of new vocal forms, including the **cantata**, **opera**, and **oratorio**.

Characteristics:

Melody

- Conjunct melody (close movement).
- Leaps are by big intervals.
- Often extended in sequences by imitation
- Embellished/ornamented melody (Cadential trill is a typical baroque feature).

Rhythm

- regular strong and weak pulses.
- complex rhythmic patterns.
- syncopations and suspensions.
- hemiola, which means 'two-in-three' rhythm, e.g. two bars in triple metre played as three bars in duple. 2
- Little or no rubato.

Harmony

- Harmonies change often occur on every beat or every two beats
- Diatonic
- Circle of fifths progressions
- Chromaticism in the melody or harmony, but still part of the tonality

Textures

- **Polyphony**: one main theme, called the subject, and the imitation of that theme by different voices.
- **Imitation**: imitative writing and contrapuntal texture. Except for fugues, imitative textures are often less strictly organised than in the Renaissance.
- **Counterpoint**: strict counterpoint of the Renaissance and free counterpoint of the Baroque.
- **Figured Bass**: no matter what the upper parts are playing, the harmony is always supplied by the harpsichord or organ according to the figured bass. That is why the bass line in baroque music is often continuous.
- **Walking Bass**: treble melody with a 'walking' or 'running' bass underneath.
- **Pedal point**: normally near the end of a piece of music. Either the tonic or the dominant and continues for a few bars while the harmony changes in the upper voices.

Music Notation

- modern symbols
- written in score notation with time signatures
- key signatures
- dynamics (piano and forte)
- measures with bar lines
- instrument and voice designations (idiomatic - the composer is well acquainted with the strengths and weaknesses of the instrument and uses that knowledge in his writing).

Tonality

- **Early Baroque (c.1580 - c.1630)** the concept of tonality was not yet established, so the music is still modal, and cadences are often embellished.
- **Mid-Baroque (c.1630- c.1680)** the concept of tonality was gradually developed, and eventually became firmly established around 1700. Major and minor scales and keys were developed.
- **Key Signatures:** a system of key signatures was created, and a desire to exploit fifth related tonal center and chord relationships resulted in modulation.
- **Tonal Center:** whilst every piece of music has a central tonality in the major or minor key, there is a key scheme like a family tree: the tonic major key has, as its related keys, the dominant major, subdominant major, and relative minor; the tonic minor key has, as its related keys, the dominant minor, subdominant minor, and relative major.
- **Modulations:** the music starts off in a clearly defined tonality and modulates to its related keys. After these excursions it finally returns to its home key.
- **Baroque key schemes** very well organized. Usually the first modulation is to the dominant; the last modulation tends to be to the subdominant before returning to the home key.

Dynamics

- **Terrace-dynamics:** Baroque music often has strong contrasts between forte and piano. Echoes (loud-soft) are common. Terrace-dynamics (crescendo or diminuendo by steps or in layers) are typical.

Musical Forms

The most common forms in baroque music are binary form, rounded binary form, do capo aria, rondeau, ground bass, fugue, French overture and ritornello structure.

- **Binary form or AB form** consists of two sections. The first section cadences in a related key and the second section in the tonic. Sometimes the second section is longer than the first.
- **Rounded binary form** is derived from the binary form. The second section includes a recapitulation of the first phrase of the first section in the tonic key.
- **Da capo aria** is literally ABA, like ternary. The B section contains modulations, and A is repeated without alteration.
- **Rondeau** is based on the alternation of a main section with subsidiary sections, e.g. ABACA. It is common in French harpsichord music and dance music.

- **Variations** a theme followed by a couple of short variations where the theme may be embellished with ornaments or treated in different figurations, whilst the harmony remains the same.
- **Ground bass** is a melodic phrase in the bass that recurs several times, with continuous variation in the upper parts.
- **Ostinato** is a figure that is repeated many times, normally in the bass. It is not a melody or a theme, but a rhythmic figure treated as an accompaniment or as a motif for extension or development.
- **Fugue** is based on one particular tune. This tune is called the **subject**. Each part has an equal share in playing the subject. A “3-part fugue” means a fugue written for three voices or instruments.
- **French Overture** has two sections: slow-quick. The slow section is majestic and full of dotted rhythm. The quick section can be a fugue, a fugal movement or a dance such as a gigue.
- **Ritornello** structure is one of the most important formal structures of the Baroque. It is a short recurring passage, e.g. the opening tutti section of an aria or a concerto movement that recurs several times in different keys in the course of the piece. It gives the piece structural unity.

- **Dance forms**
Baroque dances are all in binary form.
- **Allemande**: slow or moderate tempo, quadruple metre, short upbeat start; smooth semiquaver figurations; imitative texture.
 - **Courante**: French type- quick, 3/2, 3/4 or 6/4, upbeat start, normally polyphonic texture and ornamented Italian type- fast, running, triple time
 - **Sarabande**: slow, stately, triple time, downbeat start, accent on 2nd beat of bar, regular 4 bar phrases, often has syncopation and hemiola rhythm
 - **Bourree**: lively, duple time, upbeat start
 - **Minuet**: moderate tempo, triple time
 - **Passe pied**: in triple time, like a minuet, but faster
 - **Loure**: lilting rhythm, dotted or triplet rhythm, moderate or andante tempo.
 - **Gavotte**: quick, light and lively; duple or quadruple, upbeat or half-bar start
 - **Gigue**: fast; dotted or triplet rhythm in compound duple or simple triple or quadruple time; often contrapuntal or even fugal

There are a few more terms which are not musical forms as such, but rather matters of style:

- **Two-part Invention**: This is a two-part contrapuntal texture with criss-crossing imitation between the two hands. It is usually in binary form.
- **Trio Sonata**: This is a polyphonic piece for three solo instruments plus a basso continuo. The three solo instruments are two trebles and a bass, e.g. two violins and a cello. The bass instrument plays the continuo line. In addition, the basso continuo is also played by a harpsichord or organ which supplies the harmony by realizing the figured bass. The two treble instruments normally play imitative counterpoint between themselves. Sometimes the bass instrument also takes part in the imitative playing.
- **Toccata**: The term 'toccata' means 'touch'. It is a keyboard piece, often free in form, designed to display virtuosity or dexterity.

Musical Instruments:

String Instruments

- **Bowed String Instruments:** violin, viola, cello, double bass
- **Plucked String Instruments:** harp
- **Hammered String Instruments:** dulcimer, zither

Wind Instruments

- **Woodwind Instruments:** flute
- **Reed Instruments:** bassoon, oboe
- **Brass Instruments:** trumpet, trombone, tuba, French horn, cornet, bugle

Keyboard Instruments: harpsichord, cembalo, clavinet, pipe organ

Percussion Instruments:

- bass drum, cymbals, triangle, chimes, glockenspiel, timpani, bells, xylophone

Ensembles

In the Baroque era, a musical director occasionally stood and conducted or would typically be led by the harpsichordist or first violinist

Notable Composers

1653 - 1713 Arcangelo Corelli

1668 - 1733 Francois Couperin

1685 -1750 Johann Sebastian Bach

1685 – 1759 Georg Friedrich Händel

1653 - 1706 Johann Pachelbel

1681 - 1767 Georg Friedrich Telemann

1659 – 1695 Henry Purcell

1683 - 1764 Jean-Philippe Rameau

1685 – 1757 Domenico Scarlatti

1678 – 1741 Antonio Vivaldi