

## Baroque Period

**1600-1750**

The Baroque period stems from about 1600 to 1750. In this period, French, Italian, German, and English composers developed new styles of music. The Baroque period rebelled against the musical style of the Renaissance, offering monody rather than polyphony. Monody describes vocal music where a voice supplies the melody and the bass voices supply the background or accompaniment.

Other innovations of this period included the use of contrasting elements of music such as loud and soft, full and solo, and slow and fast. The performance of the music of the Baroque period was as important as the composition itself. This led to great



improvisations (music played without written sheet music) by performers.

## **Baroque Period**

**1600-1750**

- The Baroque era marks the introduction of a new style of music- monody. Features solo song with instrumental accompaniment.
- Monody was developed by groups of writers and musicians (such as the Florentine Camerata) to resurrect the musical-dramatic art of ancient Greece; this new vocal style focused on the text and its emotional power. (camerata – the Italian word for salon)
- Harmony was notated with figured bass, a shorthand that allowed the performer to supply the chords through improvisation. The bass part, or basso continuo, was often played by two instruments (harpsichord and cello, for example).
- The major-minor tonality system was established in the Baroque era.
- While early Baroque music moved more freely, later Baroque style is characterized by a vigorous, regular rhythm and continuous melodic expansion.
- Subtle dynamic changes contributed to the expression of emotions. Extremes of dynamics are not used.(ff, pp)
- Dynamics are note marked on the manuscript.
- As musical instruments developed technically, the level of virtuosity rose, demanding more advanced playing techniques.
- Ornaments are used to sustain the melody

## **Camerata (Florentine Camerata)**

A group of Florentine writers, artists, and musicians known as the Camerata (a name derived from the Italian word for “salon”) first cultivated this approach, which they called “the new style,” around 1600. The members of the Camerata were aristocratic humanists who aimed to resurrect the musical-dramatic art of ancient Greece. Although little was known of ancient music, the Camerata deduced that it must have heightened the emotional power of the text. Thus their “new style” consisted of a melody that moved freely over a foundation of simple chords.

## **Figured bass**

A new kind of notation accompanied the new style: since musicians were familiar with the basic harmonies, the composer put a numeral above or below the bass note, indicating the chord required (a kind of notation called **figured bass**), and the performer filled in the necessary harmony. This system, known as **basso continuo**, provided a foundation over which a vocal or instrumental melody could unfold.

## **major-minor tonality**

One of the most significant changes in all music history: was the establishment of **major-minor tonality**. With this development, the thrust to the keynote, or tonic, became the most powerful force in music. Each chord could assume its function in relation to the key centre; the movement between keys, governed by tonality, helped shape a musical structure. Composers were able to develop forms of instrumental music more significant than had ever before been known.

## **Equal Temperament,**

The transition to major-minor tonality was marked by a significant technical advance: a new tuning system that allowed instruments to play in any key. Called **equal temperament**, this tuning adjusted (or tempered) the mathematically “pure” intervals within the octave to equalize the distance between adjacent tones, making it possible to play in every major and minor key without producing unpleasant sounds, and greatly increasing the range of harmonic possibilities available to the composer. J. S. Bach demonstrated this range in his two-volume keyboard collection *The Well-Tempered Clavier*: each volume contains twenty-four preludes and fugues, one in every possible major and minor key. Today, our ears are conditioned to the equal-tempered system, since this is how pianos are now tuned.

## BAROQUE OPERA

An **opera** is a large-scale drama that is sung. It combines the resources of vocal and instrumental music—soloists, ensembles, chorus, orchestra, and sometimes ballet—with poetry and drama, acting and pantomime, scenery and costumes.

- The most important new genre of the Baroque era was **opera**, a large-scale music drama that combines poetry, acting, scenery, and costumes with singing and instrumental music.
- The principal components of opera include the orchestral **overture**, solo **arias** (lyrical songs) and **recitatives** (speechlike declamations of the text), and ensemble numbers, including **choruses**.
- The text of an opera is called a **libretto**. The earliest opera libretti were based on mythology, epic poetry, and ancient history.
- Henry Purcell wrote *Dido and Aeneas*, based on *The Aeneid*, a Roman epic by Virgil. The closing Lament of Dido is a powerful expression of grief that reflects contemporary ideals about womanhood

EX – Monteverdi – the Coronation of Poppa

## Lutheran Cantata (sacred)

### Cantata

- Lutheran musical worship is structured around congregational hymns, known as **chorales**, which are specific to each Sunday service.
- The **church cantatas** of Johann Sebastian Bach were mostly written for the Lutheran church service; they are multimovement works with solo arias, recitatives, and choruses, all with orchestral accompaniment.
- Bach's cantata *Wachet auf (Sleepers, Awake)* is based on a well-known Lutheran chorale tune.

### Oratorio

- service; they are multimovement works with solo arias, recitatives, and choruses, all with orchestral accompaniment.
- The Baroque oratorio is a large-scale dramatic genre with a religious or Biblical text performed by solo voices, chorus, and orchestra; it is not staged or costumed.
- George Frideric Handel was known for his Italian operas and, later in life, his English-texted oratorios (including *Messiah*).
- *Messiah* is set in three parts: the Christmas section, which opens with a French overture and features recitatives (*secco* and *accompagnato*), lyrical arias, and majestic choruses; the

Easter section, which closes with the famous "Hallelujah Chorus"; and the final Redemption section.

- The text for Messiah is drawn from a compilation of Old and New Testament

The **oratorio**, one of the great Baroque sacred vocal forms, descended from the religious play-with-music of the Counter-Reformation. It took its name from the Italian word for "place of prayer," and early oratorios were sponsored by the Catholic Church in public meeting places as ways to convey its messages about faith to as wide an audience as possible. A large-scale musical work for solo voices, chorus, and orchestra, the oratorio was generally based on a biblical story and performed without scenery, costumes, or acting. The action was sometimes depicted with the help of a narrator, but in other ways, oratorio was very much like opera on a religious theme—on purpose, since the Catholic Church wanted to propose oratorio as a more moral alternative to opera. Like operas, oratorios unfolded as a series of recitatives and arias, with duets, trios, and choruses.

messiah

In the spring of 1742, the city of Dublin witnessed the premiere of what became one of the English-speaking world's best-loved works, Handel's *Messiah* (LG 14). The composer was reputed to have written down the oratorio in only twenty-four days, working as if possessed. The story circulated of his servant finding him, after the completion of the "Hallelujah Chorus," with tears in his eyes. "I did think I did see all Heaven before me, and the Great God Himself!" he reportedly said. Such stories about divine inspiration and the genius composer's ability to create in an almost superhuman fashion helped to build the reputation of *Messiah* and oratorios like it. The libretto is a compilation of biblical verses from the Old and New Testaments, set in three parts. The first part (the Christmas section) relates the prophecy of the coming of Christ and his birth; the second (the Easter section), his suffering, death, and the spread of his doctrine; and the third, the redemption of the world through faith. The orchestration features mainly strings; oboes and bassoons

strengthen the choral parts, and trumpets and drums are reserved for special numbers. The lovely soprano aria “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion” is in three-part, or **A-B-A** form. In this type of **da capo aria**, the composer usually did not write out the third part (**A**), since it duplicated the first, allowing the star singer the opportunity to ornament or elaborate the third part on the fly, a crowd-pleasing device in both opera and oratorio. For “Rejoice greatly,” though, Handel did write out the last section, varying it considerably from the first. This may have been partly because he liked having as much control as possible over the expressive shape of the music, rather than leaving too many choices up to his performers. It may also have had to do with the fact that some of the first English oratorio performers were less skilled (especially in improvisation) than their Italian operatic counterparts, so Handel may have thought it prudent to give his singer as detailed a set of instructions as possible. At the beginning of this



# Style Summary for Baroque Music (c. 1600–1750)

Composers	Monteverdi, Cozzolani, Strozzi, Purcell, Vivaldi, Bach, Handel
Melody	Continuous melody with wide leaps, chromatic tones for emotional effect; speechlike melody in recitative.
Rhythm/ meter	Single rhythm predominant; steady, energetic pulse; freer in early Baroque vocal music.
Harmony	Major-minor tonal system established; chromatic harmony used for expressive effect.
Texture	Homophony and polyphony both common, often used in alternation or to provide contrasts; linear-horizontal dimension.
Vocal genres	Opera, Mass, Magnificat, oratorio, cantata, anthem
Instrumental genres	Concerto, suite, sonata, prelude, fugue, dance music
Form	Binary and ternary forms predominant; ritornello (refrain) procedure in larger forms.
Dynamics	Subtle dynamic nuances; <i>forte/piano</i> contrasts; echo effects
Timbre	Continuous tone color throughout a movement; penetrating sound of historical instruments
Instrumental forces	String orchestra, with added woodwinds; organ and harpsichord prevalent.
Improvisation	Improvisation expected; harmonies realized from figured bass.
Expression	Emotional exuberance and theatricality