



The Baroque Period (1600-1750)

The word **BAROQUE** means “Fancy decoration” and “ornamentation” in art, architecture, fashion and music and refers to music that was composed in a certain time period between 1600-1750 (the year one of the greatest Baroque composers – J. S. Bach – died). Music written during the Baroque period is very **ORNATE** and **DECORATED**. **POLYPHONIC** and **CONTRAPUNTAL** textures are very common. Baroque music was performed mainly in **CHURCH** or in the **PRIVATE SALONS OF THE RICH** with a **SMALL ENSEMBLE** and **SMALL AUDIENCE**- known as **CHAMBER MUSIC**. Dancing was popular in the Baroque period and the orchestral music which accompanied it (see ‘**THE BAROQUE DANCE SUITE**’ below) was often performed separately (without dancing) as a stand-alone instrumental **SUITE**.

Instruments, Timbres and Sonorities

STRINGS - VIOLS (older types of string instruments) popular in the early Baroque, but superseded by **VIOLINS, VIOLAS, CELLOS** (and later double basses) forming the backbone of the Baroque Orchestra. The **LUTE** was also a popular string instrument used mainly for solos or accompanying songs.

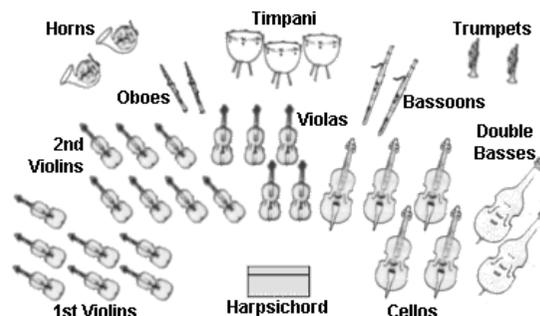
WOODWIND – FLUTES (wooden), **RECORDERS, OBOES** and **BASSOONS**.

BRASS – TRUMPETS (valveless, hence only being able to play a limited amount of pitches) used on special occasions and for dramatic effect only.

PERCUSSION – TIMPANI (kettle drums) the only notable percussion instrument used in the Baroque period, again for special effects and dramatic occasions.

KEYBOARD – ORGAN and **HARPSICHORD** (its “tinkling” timbre easily identifies Baroque from other types of music!) are the main keyboard instruments, both performed the role of the **CONTINUO** (‘filling out the harmonies’) performing from **FIGURED BASS** notation. Often the Harpsichord player led the Baroque orchestra (no conductors (or pianos!) yet!)

The Baroque Orchestra



Melody and Texture

Baroque Melodies are often **DECORATED** or **ORNAMENTED** by the performer adding embellishments and ornaments (trills, turns etc.) or extra notes during performances, giving a “busy” feel to the melody of much Baroque music.

The melody line of much Baroque Orchestral Music was often performed by **FIRST VIOLINS**.

IMITATION - often used in Baroque Orchestral Music – a “dialogue” between instruments copying or echoing each other with the same musical phrase/idea, sometimes at different pitches

SEQUENCE – a short melodic idea, repeated again at a higher or lower pitch, by the same or a different instrument(s).

The frequent use of **IMITATION** in much Baroque Orchestral Music often results in a **POLYPHONIC** texture – a dense, overlapping of sound as different instrumental parts “weave” together in a complex web of sounds e.g. **FUGUE**.

HOMOPHONIC (melody and accompaniment) textures were more common in genres such as the **SOLO CONCERTO** or **SONATAS**.

Harmony and Tonality

Music in the Baroque period is now clearly either **MAJOR** or **MINOR** (replacing the old Medieval and Renaissance system of **MODES**). Pieces written in the Baroque period that are in a minor key often end on a final chord in the **TONIC MAJOR** – called a **TIERCE DE PICARDIE** (a major ending in a minor key).

An **OPERA** is a **SECULAR** drama set to music, acted and sung with costumes, scenery and props, by solo singers and a **CHORUS**, accompanied by an orchestra. The lyrics or text of an opera is called the **LIBRETTO** (written by a **LIBRETTIST**) (the plot or storyline being called the **SYNOPSIS**) and was developed in Florence in the late 1500’s by the Camerata who wanted to place more importance on the words, rather than the music. Operas are performed in theatres and concert halls. **ORATORIO** developed at the same time but is a **SACRED** setting of religious words, often from the Bible, for solo singers, chorus and orchestra. Unlike an opera, an oratorio is not “staged” – no costumes, scenery, acting or props and was not performed in theatres – mainly churches or concert halls. Both **OPERA** and **ORATORIOS** are made up of different vocal forms (as well as the occasional instrumental interlude or piece at the beginning – called the **OVERTURE**). **RECITATIVE** – a type of “half spoken/reciting-half sung” singing developed to enhance the meaning of the words. The voice rises and falls following the natural speech rhythms of the words and used to “carry the plot/story forward”. **RECITATIVE SECCO** is accompanied only by the **CONTINUO** (often with sustained chords playing from **FIGURED BASS** with a slow **HARMONIC RHYTHM**); **RECITATIVE STROMENTATO** features a richer accompaniment by the strings. **ARIA** – a **SOLO** song sung by one of the main characters, often quite long and expressive and reflecting the character’s mood or emotion at a particular point in the drama/story. The **DA CAPO ARIA** (popular from early 1700’s) featured a repeated A section with a contrasting middle B section and instrumental **RITORNELLO** sections - R A R1 A1 R2 B R A R1 A1 R2 and was **VIRTUOSIC** with **MELODIC DECORATION** and embellishment being added on the repeat of the A section. **CHORUS** – often written for **SATB** voices and orchestra. Other types of sacred vocal music popular in the Baroque period were: settings of the **MASS, CANTATAS** (vocal work in several movements with choir accompanied by orchestra), **CHORALES, PASSIONS, ANTHEMS**.

Dynamics

TERRACED DYNAMICS – music in either “loud” or “soft” sections (no use of *cresc.* or *dim.*) One “mood” usual lasted throughout a movement although a movement could have “loud” and “soft” sections for contrast.

Baroque Instrumental Music

GROUND BASS – a repeating melodic bass line pattern (**OSTINATO**) used as a basis upon which to add other melodic layers e.g. “Canon” by Pachelbel, often resulting in a thick, **POLYPHONIC** musical texture.

FUGUE – a main theme (subject) is answered by a second theme (answer) together with other instrumental parts (called “voices”) adding additional lines e.g. counter subject) creating a dense web of **POLYPHONIC** or **CONTRAPUNTAL** texture.

CONCERTO GROSSO – A group of soloists (**CONCERTANTE**) share the duties of playing solo melodies, contrasted with an orchestra of “less able” players (**RIPIENO**), normally 3-4 contrasting movements.

SOLO CONCERTO – one soloist, often performing difficult and complex solos, accompanied by an orchestra, normally 3-4 contrasting movements. Normally starts **TUTTI** – all the instruments playing together.

SONATA – a solo instrument accompanied by the Cello or Harpsichord (**CONTINUO**), usually in 3-4 contrasting movements and called after the instrument in which they feature e.g. Violin Sonata = solo violin & continuo. Can be performed in a church (**SONATA DA CHIESA**) or a private salon/chamber (**SONATA DA CAMERA**).

The Baroque Dance Suite

Formed by grouping a set of shorter pieces together to form a **SUITE** – contrasting tempo, mood, metres and rhythms; normally in the same key but sometimes tonic minor used for extra musical contrast. The Baroque Dance Suite had 4 key **MOVEMENTS**, each normally in **BINARY FORM (AB)** with each section usually repeated.

ALLEMANDE – often opened the Suite, German origin, moderate tempo, stately character, 4/4 metre

COURANTE – normally followed the Allemande, French origin, 3/4 metre, fast tempo, lively character and frequent use of dotted rhythms.

SARABANDE – slow and serious dance originating in Spain, in minim time e.g. 3/2, emphasis on second beat of the bar, often the melody line decorated with ornaments.

GIGUE – fastest of the movements and often at the end, lively character in compound time e.g. 6/8

A **MINUET** – a stately dance of elegant character in 3/4 time often in **BINARY FORM** but often two different minuets, usually in a contrasting key, were played one after the other, the first minuet repeated at the end to form an overall **TERNARY FORM (ABA)** structure. A **GAVOTTE** or a **BOURRÉE** may be inserted before the final Gigue.

Baroque Composers



Monteverdi (1567-1643)



Domenico Scarlatti (1685-1757)



Vivaldi (1678-1741)



Corelli (1653-1713)



Purcell (1659-1695)



Couperin (1668-1733)



Rameau (1683-1764)



Lully (1632-1687)



J.S.Bach (1685-1750)



Handel (1685-1759)