

THE BAROQUE (1600 – 1750): THE ERA OF THE OPERA & THE HARPSICHORD



The Baroque Era was a time of magnificence and splendor in architecture, music and art. It was also a time of intense religious feeling and a time of devastation and destruction in Europe. Art and music were supported largely by wealthy nobility and the Church. Noblemen and clergymen were both well educated, and were interested in the arts and sciences. Works of art were frequently created for a specific purpose (special occasion) and therefore, fulfilled a practical purpose as well as giving artistic pleasure.

Musicians were thought of as servants. However, they enjoyed a certain independence since musicians were also frequently organized into musician guilds (a sort of union). The guilds regulated training and worked to uphold the rights of their members. Through the guilds, standards of excellence were maintained in the musical profession. The Baroque also marks the first time that composers begin to exercise control over their compositions by beginning to designate instrumentation in the score.

Wind Bands continued to provide music for marching, military functions and other public ceremonies. Band continued to be an integral part of military and civic ceremonies, performing marches and arrangements of orchestral pieces. These European musical traditions were brought to North America by American and British Colonists and Regimental bands. By 1750, bands were made up of approximately 10 musicians. The hautbois (oboe) was developed in France during this period and gradually replaced the traditional shawm. By the 1720s, clarinets, horns, and trumpets began to be used. One of the most important developments of the 1700's for wind bands was the addition and use of Turkish percussion instruments (cymbals, etc.). This resulted in adding more wind instruments for improved volume because of the extended use of percussion.

The word 'Baroque' was initially applied more to art than to music, but was used to imply strangeness, abnormality and extravagance,. Literally meaning "a misshapen pearl" ('*barocco*' in Portuguese), the term originally referred to the art of the period as it was heavily ornamented, in some cases to the point of distraction.

The beginning of the Baroque is marked by the invention of OPERA and ends with the death of J.S. Bach.



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Some general characteristics of Baroque Music:

MELODY:	A single melodic idea
RHYTHM:	Continuous rhythmic drive
TEXTURE:	Balance of homophonic (melody with chordal harmony) and polyphonic textures
TIMBRE:	Orchestral – strings, winds (and harpsichord) with very little percussion
DYNAMICS:	Abrupt shift from loud to soft (terraced) achieved by adding or subtracting instruments
OVERALL:	Music that projects a single mood or expression of feeling.

Some Important Definitions:

<i>Ornament</i>	A note or group of notes that embellishes a melody
<i>Antiphonal</i>	A performance style in which an ensemble is divided into two or more groups, performing alternately as separate groups and in unison.
<i>Virtuoso</i>	An extremely skilled singer or instrumentalist
<i>Cadenza</i>	An unaccompanied passage before the end of a piece where the virtuoso ‘shows their stuff’
<i>Harpsichord</i>	Early stringed keyboard instrument that produced pitches by means of plucking strings with quills, rather than striking them with hammers (like the piano)
<i>Counterpoint</i>	The interplay of independent musical strands. The art of combining two (or more) simultaneous musical lines
<i>Opera</i>	Drama set to music; consists of singing with orchestral accompaniment
<i>Fugue</i>	A polyphonic composition consisting of a series of successive melodic imitations

Some Important Composers:

Claudio Monteverdi (1567-1643)

Henry Purcell (1659-1695)

Antonio Vivaldi (1678 – 1741)

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685 – 1750)

George Friedrich Handel (1685 – 1759)