

BAROQUE MUSIC

INTRODUCTION

The date of the Baroque period differs slightly between textbooks. For the purpose of this section of the site, I will use 1600-1750 as the beginning and ending of this period of music.

ORIGIN OF THE TERM “BAROQUE”

The origin of the term “Baroque” comes from the Portuguese word “barroco”, meaning “misshapen pearl”, due to both the architecture and music of this period. The systematic application of the term “baroque” to music of this period is a relatively recent development. Even in 1960, there was still considerable dispute in academic circles whether it was meaningful to put together music as diverse as that of Jacopo Peri, Domenico Scarlatti, and J.S. Bach with a single term; yet the term has become widely used and accepted for this broad range of music. It may be helpful to distinguish it from both the preceding (Renaissance) and following (Classical) periods of musical history.

IMPORTANCE OF BAROQUE MUSIC

Baroque music forms a major portion of the classical music canon, being widely studied, performed and listened to, and also saw the development of functional tonality. Many important and distinct changes were made in this period, including more elaborate musical notation, musical notation, and the development of new instrumental playing techniques, and also established opera as a musical genre. Many musical forms and concepts from this era are still in use today.

SIMPLICITY

Baroque composers sought simplicity in music. They rejected the complex polyphony of the Renaissance and sought to revive an ancient Greek form of musical drama, the monody, which primarily consisted of a simple solo melody with accompaniment. With the expansion of these ideas came a new found freedom in music. This was also sought in the church as to make the text of sacred works clearer. This was done by putting the words front and center, creating the demand for a more intricate weaving of the vocal line against backdrop (homophony).

THE PRINTING PRESS

This was by far the most important invention in this period of time (not just for music, but worldwide). The printing press allowed for a greater distribution of music to be sought and found from all over the world, which created an expanded international audience for works and greater cross-pollination between national centers for musical activity.

TRANSITION TO THE CLASSICAL ERA

Musical demands start to change as well as economics and worldview. This created a problem for musical culture; the masters of the older style had the technique but the public wanted new music. The decline of the baroque saw various attempts to mix old and new techniques, and many composers who continued to hew to the older forms well into the 1780s. The practice of the baroque era was the standard against which new composition was measured. This transition also affected church music in which a division was found between that of Renaissance and Baroque sacred works.