

# Music 111 – Music Appreciation

## Music of the Baroque Period (1600-1750)

### INTELLECTUAL CHARACTERISTICS

- Grandiose** - Baroque artists tended to think big. Large instrument –the pipe organ; large and complex musical genre – opera.
- Dramatic** - Three major dramatic musical genres developed: opera, oratorio, cantata.
- Religious** - Intense religious feelings, both Protestant and Catholic influenced all of the arts.

### MUSICAL CHARACTERISTICS

- Melodies have continuous flow. They are closely tied to the text and enhance meaning.
- Melodies were elaborate and highly ornamented.
- Unity of Mood–mood remained consistent throughout a movement.
- *Basso continuo* provides steady rhythmic and harmonic foundation. Played by organ or harpsichord and a low-pitched instrument such as the bassoon or cello.
- Systematic use of harmony and chord progression, major and minor keys replace the modes. Modulation, or changing keys within a piece of music, becomes common.
- Both polyphonic and homophonic textures used. Melody and bass line play more important role than inner voices in homophonic writing.
- 2-part (binary) and 3-part (ternary forms are used.
- Improvisation and embellishment (ornamentation) of written music was common.
- Terraced dynamics. Baroque composers favored stark contrasts of loud and soft volume over gradual changes in dynamics. Baroque keyboard instruments were not capable of gradual dynamic changes.

### DOCTRINE OF AFFECTIONS

Expanded on earlier Renaissance word painting. It was a belief that composers could manipulate the emotional or affective qualities of music. It was believed that each movement, or section of a work should have one consistent mood. Composers sought new and innovative ways to have the notes of the music depict the words of the text.

### VOCAL MUSIC

**Opera** Designed to unify music and drama. A play set to music with orchestra, solo singer/actors, chorus, sets, scenery, and props.

**Recitative** Replaces spoken dialogue in opera/oratorio/cantata. It helps to move the story. Sung with flexible rhythm and simple accompanying music which follows the rhythm and natural speech patterns of the text. Emphasis is on the text and not the melody. **Secco** or “dry” recitative is when the singer is accompanied by the continuo only. **Accompanied** recitatives feature orchestral accompaniment.

**Aria** Rather long vocal solo with instrumental accompaniment that is usually very melodic and often features *virtuoso* singing. Words and phrases are often repeated. Usually in ternary or binary form. Could feature *ostinato* or *ground bass* accompaniment.

**Oratorio** Like an opera based on religious text but without acting, scenery, sets, props, or costumes. Oratorios were typically long, multi-movement works which were intended for concert performance and not part of regular church services. Like opera they feature orchestra, soloists, and chorus performing arias, recitatives, ensembles, chorus numbers and orchestral solo sections.

**Cantata** Much shorter than an oratorio. Cantatas were performed during the worship service. Feature orchestra, soloists, and chorus performing arias, recitatives, and choruses. (Like a short oratorio.) A “sermon in music.”

**Chorale** A Lutheran hymn melody with a strong and simple tune. Chorales were designed for congregational singing and were musically important because composers often used these chorale tunes as the basis of cantatas and other larger works.

**Passion** An oratorio based on the events of Christ's crucifixion. ("Good Friday" story set to music.)

## INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC

Baroque period is the first time that composers begin writing specific instrumental parts for their works and begin writing with specific instrument in mind.

**Main keyboard instruments** – Pipe organ and harpsichord. Clavichord was also used in intimate settings but wasn't loud enough for large performance spaces. (The piano had not yet been invented.)

**Baroque orchestra** – Much smaller than today's orchestra and featured about twenty performers, mainly string instruments of the violin family and continuo. Occasionally a few wind instruments were added. There was no conductor standing in front of the group. Usually the harpsichord player or a violinist would signal the group for starts and stops.

**FUGUE** A polyphonic instrumental form (usually for a keyboard instrument) featuring the presentation of a theme, or **subject**, in imitation in several parts (**voices**) Fugues also feature a contrasting **countersubject** and free contrapuntal material to add variety to the unity created by repeating melodic material.

**SUITE** A collection of original instrumental pieces (usually for keyboard instruments) based on the rhythms, meters, and tempos of a variety of popular dance forms. **UNITY** created by all of the different sections being written in the same key. **VARIETY** achieved through the contrasting tempos of the dances which were often arranged in a fast-slow-fast order. Usually included were *allemande, courant, sarabande, and gigue*. Composers often included a second version, or double, of a dance in a parallel major or minor key. (If the original was in C major, the double would be in C minor.)

**CONCERTO GROSSO** An orchestral work which featured contrast between a large group, called the **tutti**, and a small group which featured one or more soloists and the continuo. The movements of a concert grosso usually alternate tempos in a fast – slow – fast or slow – fast – slow pattern. Often composed in **ritornello form** which features repeated melodic material played by the tutti alternating with new and contrasting material played by the soloists.

## NOTABLE FEATUERS OF BAROQUE MUSIC

**Dramatic, intense, grandiose style**

**Ornamented melodies**

**Terraced dynamics**

**Steady, metrical rhythm**

**Equal temperament**

**Doctrine of Affections**

**Virtuoso performers**

**Primarily Polyphonic texture (Homophonic in early baroque)**

**Large vocal genres developed: opera, oratorio, cantata**

**Instrumental music became as important as vocal music**

**Large instrumental forms: concerto grosso, sonata, and fugue**

**Use of figured bass and continuo instruments**

**Organ reached its height of development**

**Harpsichord favored as the accompanying instrument**