

Music Appreciation - Chapter 4

The Late Baroque Period

I. Introduction

In the latter 17th and early 18th centuries, the medium for which music was composed helped to determine how it was composed. There are two main categories of instrumental music, keyboard and ensemble music.

A. Keyboard Music The principal genres of keyboard music are these:

1. Toccata, prelude, or fantasia and fugue;
2. Settings of chorales or chants, such as a chorale prelude or verses;
3. Variations;
4. Passacaglia and chaconne;
5. Suite; and
6. Sonata (after 1700).

B. Ensemble Music The principal genres of ensemble music are these:

1. Sonata (sonata da chiesa), sinfonia, and related forms;
2. Sonata da camera, dance suite, and related forms; and
3. Concerto.

II. Organ Music

A. The Baroque Organ

Baroque organs could achieve a variety of timbres, with several keyboards and many different ranks of pipes available for each keyboard. The organist selected the registration by pulling out a knob (called a stop) for each desired set of pipes. Among the prominent German organist-composers in the late 17th century were Buxtehude and Pachelbel. Much organ music was written for Protestant services, where it served as a prelude to part of the service.

B. The Toccata

The 17th-century German toccata or prelude includes not only sections in toccata style but also one or more sections in imitative counterpoint. The toccata sections have an improvisatory feel, with unpredictable harmony, surprising contrasts of texture, and virtuoso passagework. The imitative sections are like fugues embedded between toccata sections. From this contrast evolved the 18th century form of toccata and fugue or prelude and fugue. Music: NAWM 73

C. The Fugue

The ricercare was gradually replaced by the fugue, which was composed as an independent piece or as part of a prelude. A fugue opens with an exposition, in which the subject, or dux (leader), in the tonic is imitated by the answer, or comes (companion), in the dominant and the other voices alternate tonic and dominant. Later appearances of the subject are also called expositions and are interspersed with episodes where the subject is absent and modulation may occur.

D. Equal Temperament

Preludes and fugues were also used as teaching pieces for performance and composition. Lute players could play in all 24 major and minor keys because their frets were equally spaced, giving equal temperament. Keyboard players in the Baroque era often preferred meantone temperament, an unequal tuning that gave better thirds in most keys but did not allow the use of all 24 keys.

E. Chorale Compositions

Chorales were used in several different types of organ compositions. Chorales could be accompanied with harmonizations or counterpoint; varied in chorale variations (also called a chorale partita); fragmented and developed in a chorale fantasia; or presented in embellished form.

F. The Chorale Prelude

A chorale prelude presents a chorale once, varied or elaborated in a contrapuntal setting. Most chorale preludes use one of the following procedures: (1) each phrase of the melody is treated in imitation; (2) each phrase is presented cantus firmus style and is preceded by an imitative foreshadowing of the phrase in smaller note values; (3) the melody is ornamented over a contrapuntal accompaniment; (4) the melody is presented unadorned over an accompaniment marked by a repeating rhythmic figure.

G. Organ Music in the Catholic Countries

Organ composers in Italy, southern Germany, and Spain continued to use early 17th-century forms, writing ricercars, variation canzonas, settings of liturgical cantus firmi, and non-imitative toccatas. French composers wrote airs, antiphonal "dialogues" between parts of

the organ, and versets and interludes for the Mass.

III. Harpsichord and Clavichord Music

The same sorts of works written for organ were also written for stringed keyboard instruments, but the most important genres for the latter were the theme and variations and the suite.

A. Theme and Variations

Variation sets continued to be popular.

Composers often wrote variations on an original melody rather than an existing tune.

B. Suite The suite was a popular form in the late 17th and early 18th centuries.

1. French clavecinists (harpsichordists) wrote many suites using a variety of dance movements. Elisabeth-Claude Jacquet de la Guerre (1665-1729) was hailed as a child prodigy and became renowned for her harpsichord, ensemble, and vocal music. The ordres of Francois Couperin contain any number of short movements, most of them in dance rhythms and mostly with evocative titles. Couperin's treatise *L'Art de toucher le clavecin* (The Art of Playing the Clavichord, 1716) detailed how to play the harpsichord, including fingering and performing the agréments (French ornaments).

2. In Germany, the suite (also called partita) by 1700 always featured four dances of varying meter, tempo, and national origin in a set order:

—an allemande, a German dance in continuous eighth or sixteenth notes in a moderately fast duple meter, with a short upbeat;

—a courante, a French dance in moderate 6/4 or 3/2 time, often motivically related to the allemande;

—a sarabande, a Mexican-Spanish dance in slow triple meter, often emphasizing the second beat, and usually more homophonic than the others; and

—a gigue, an Anglo-Irish dance (the jig) usually in a fast 12/8 or 6/8 with a skipping melody and often in imitative counterpoint.

A suite might also contain an introductory prelude or one or more dances added after one of the last three standard dances.

C. The Keyboard Sonata

The sonata, primarily a genre for ensembles, was transferred to the keyboard by Johann

Kuhnau (1661-1722) at the end of the 17th century.

IV. Ensemble Music

A. Italy

Italian composers continued to dominate instrumental chamber music during the 17th and early 18th centuries, as they did in opera and cantata. This was also the era of the great Cremona violin makers, Nicolo Amati (1596-1684), Antonio Stradivari (1644-1737), and Giuseppe Bartolomeo Guarneri (1698-1744).

B. The Ensemble Sonata

After 1630, "sonata" and "sinfonia" increasingly designated instrumental works independent of voices. The sonata was a work in several contrasting sections or movements for a small number of instruments with basso continuo.

After about 1660, there were two main types, although in practice the two types were mixed:

1. Sonata da chiesa (church sonata), which was not based on dance styles;

2. Sonata da camera (chamber sonata), a suite of stylized dances.

A trio sonata is a sonata (of either type) for two treble instruments (usually violins) and basso continuo. This is the most common instrumentation for a sonata, followed by the solo sonata for one treble instrument and continuo.

C. Italian Chamber Music

The Church of San Petronio in Bologna was an important center for chamber music.

D. Arcangelo Corelli

Arcangelo Corelli (1653-1713) was the greatest master of late-17th-century Italian instrumental music. After studies at Bologna, he lived in Rome. He published two sets each of trio sonatas da chiesa and trio sonatas da camera, a set of solo violin sonatas, and a set of concerti grossi, with twelve works in each set.

E. Corelli's Trio Sonatas

Corelli's trio sonatas feature lyrical violin lines within a limited range of technique.

Suspensions and sequences drive the music forward and help to create the directed harmonic motion characteristic of common-practice tonality (which was new in Corelli's

generation). His church sonatas most often include four movements in the pattern slow-fast-slow-fast. Most often the first movement is a majestic prelude, the second a fugue, the third like a slow aria or duet, and the finale a fast binary dance, such as a gigue. His chamber sonatas typically begin with a prelude and include two or three dance movements. Each movement presents and develops a single melodic idea.

F. Corelli's Solo Sonatas

Corelli's violin sonatas also divide into equal numbers of church and chamber sonatas and use the same types of movement. Here the violin is given much more difficult passagework, including double and triple stops, rapid runs and arpeggios, and moto perpetuo movements. Corelli's playing and teaching were as influential on later violinists as his music was on later composers.

G. Improvisation in Musical Performance

Performers in the 17th and 18th centuries were expected to embellish written melodies, whether with small figures such as trills, turns, appoggiaturas, and mordents or with longer and freer ornamentation through scales, passagework, arpeggios, and the like. Ornamentation was not only decorative, but added interest and helped to convey the affections. A cadenza was an improvised extension of the six-four chord in a cadence near the end of a movement. Performers could also omit movements or sections and add instruments as desired. (In other words, pieces were regarded as opportunities for performance, not as hallowed works that were only to be performed as the composer intended.)

H. Ensemble Sonatas Outside Italy

Composers in England, Germany, and France wrote trio sonatas, following the Italian model. The most important trio sonatas in France are those by Francois Couperin, who sought a union of Corelli's style with the French style.

I. The Solo Sonata after Corelli

Composers in Germany, England, and France also wrote solo sonatas on the Italian model. An influential pupil of Corelli's was Francesco Geminiani (1687-1762), active in London as violinist and composer and author of the

important treatise *The Art of Playing on the Violin* (1751).

J. Works for Larger Ensembles

Sonatas, dance suites, and other types of composition were also written for larger ensembles. In Germany, music was cultivated not only at courts by the nobility but also in the cities by the middle class. Many towns had a collegium musicum, a group that played and sang music for their own pleasure, and a town band, the *Stadt pfeifer*.

K. Orchestral Music

In the late 17th century, musicians began to distinguish between chamber music for one player on a part and orchestral music for more than one instrument playing a part. It is not clear from most scores which medium the composer preferred. Opera overtures and dances were always conceived as orchestral music. The Paris opera orchestra was the most famous in Europe, renowned for its discipline.

L. The Orchestral Suite

The orchestral suite was a German form based on the model of Lully's suites extracted from his operas and ballets. These suites were also called overtures, after the French overture which always opened each suite.

M. The Concerto

The instrumental concerto was a new genre that emerged in the late 17th century and became the most important orchestral genre in the 18th century. In the orchestral concerto, the first violin dominated and the texture was less contrapuntal than in the sonata and sinfonia. More important were the concerto grosso, which contrasted a small ensemble (called the concerting, or little ensemble) with the orchestra (called the concerto grosso, or large ensemble), and the solo concerto, which set a solo instrument with continuo against the orchestra. In both, the full orchestra was also called tutti (all) or ripieno (full). Concerto-like textures were frequent in 17th-century vocal and instrumental music before the concerto emerged as a separate form. Like sonatas and sinfonias, concertos were played in church before certain segments of the Mass or as a substitute for the Offertory. Corelli's concerti grossi were like sonatas punctuated by changes of texture.

N. Torelli

Giuseppe Torelli (1658-1709) helped to codify the concerto as a work in three movements in the pattern fast-slow-fast. The fast movements are in ritornello form, in which the large group states a ritornello in the tonic at the beginning; the soloist or soloists contribute an episode, which usually modulates; the large group states the ritornello (or a part of it) in the new key; this alternation of episode and ritornello continues for some time; and the movement draws to a close with the reappearance of the ritornello in the tonic

MUSIC IN THE EARLY EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

I. In the decades between 1720 and 1750, music of the high Baroque competed with a simpler, more songful style. Venice was still an important center for music printing, opera, church music, and instrumental composition.

II. Antonio Vivaldi

A. Vivaldi's Career

Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741) was trained as a musician and priest. His main post was as music director, teacher, conductor, and composer at the Pio Ospedale della Pieta in Venice, a home and school for girls who were orphaned or abandoned. Music was an important part of the curriculum, and the concerts at the Pieta were well attended. At this time, there were no musical "classics," and audiences expected new music every season. Vivaldi composed very quickly and always for a specific occasion, writing concertos, oratorios, and church music for the Pieta and 49 operas for theaters in Venice and other cities. About 500 of his concertos survive, along with about 90 sonatas, and many operas and religious works.

B. The Vocal Works

Vivaldi is best known today as an instrumental composer, but in his time he was also successful as a composer of church music and of opera.

C. The Concertos

Vivaldi's concertos are marked by clear forms, memorable melodies, rhythmic energy, and masterful contrasts of sonority and texture. Two-thirds are for solo with orchestra, usually violin, but also cello, flute, or bassoon; others use two soloists or a concerting group of which

one or two members are the main soloists. Most of his concertos are in three movements, with fast outer movements in ritornello form and a slow middle movement in a closely related key. In Vivaldi's hands ritornello form is infinitely variable, not at all a rigid scheme. The soloist in the fast movements is a real virtuoso, standing apart from the orchestra as a singer does in an opera. The slow movements are often arioso. His sinfonias mark him as an early forerunner of the Classic-era symphony. Some of his works are programmatic, such as the four concertos in *The Four Seasons*.

D. Vivaldi's Influence

Vivaldi had a strong influence on other composers of instrumental music, including J. S. Bach, who arranged several of Vivaldi's concertos for keyboard.

III. Jean-Philippe Rameau

A. Rameau's Career

Jean-Philippe Rameau (1683-1764) was the foremost French composer of the 18th century. He had a unique career, becoming known first as a theorist and only later as a composer and writing his major works late in life. His early training and positions were as an organist. In 1722 he published his *Traite' de l'harmonie* (Treatise on Harmony), which made his reputation as a theorist, but he had difficulty establishing himself as a composer.

B. La Poupliniere

In 1731, Rameau became organist, conductor, and composer for Alexandre-Jean-Joseph Le Riche de la Poupliniere, a rich nobleman and tax collector and an avid patron of music. Rameau wrote numerous operas and opera-ballets which, with the aid of his patron, were produced in Paris. His operas secured his reputation as a composer, but they also inspired a debate between his devotees (the *Ramistes*) and those who attacked him as a subverter of the tradition of Lully (the *Lullistes*).

C. Rameau's Theoretical Works

Rameau sought to put music theory on a solid acoustical basis. He is the founder of the theory of tonal music (or functional harmony), as opposed to modal music, and all subsequent tonal theory is derived in some measure from his work. He posited the chord as the basic unit

in music; derived it from the overtone series; and suggested that a chord maintained its identity and its original root even when inverted. He established the tonic, dominant, and subdominant chords as the pillars of harmony and related all other chords to them.

D. Musical Style

French interest in spectacle is exemplified in Rameau's *Les Indes galantes* (*The Gallant Indies*, 1735), an opera-ballet in four acts set in exotic locales in Asia and North and South America. Rameau's operas are like Lully's in using dramatic declamation, mixing recitatives with airs, choruses, and instrumental interludes, and including long divertissements. But his style is quite different. Rameau believed that melody was rooted in harmony; his melodies often are triadic, plainly revealing their underlying harmony, and much of Rameau's expressiveness comes from his use of harmonic dissonance and modulation. His overtures expanded on the Lully model. His airs, like those of other French composers, are restrained in comparison to Italian arias, while his choruses are effective and his instrumental interludes remarkable in their ability to depict scenes.

E. Summary

Rameau was typical of French artists of his time in combining clarity and elegance with a talent for depiction and in being a thinker as well as a creator.

IV. Johann Sebastian Bach

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750) was not the most famous composer of his time but has become so in the last two centuries. He was born in Eisenach into a family of professional musicians and was trained by his father and elder brother. He served as a church organist at Arnstadt (1703-7) and Muhlhausen (1707-8), court organist and concertmaster for the duke of Weirnar (1708-17), music director for a prince in Cothen (1717-23), and cantor of St. Thomas's Church and School in Leipzig (1723-50), writing music for his immediate use in each position. He blended German, French, and Italian styles, which he learned by copying and arranging music by the leading composers of each region.

V. Bach's Instrumental Music

A. The Organ Works

Bach's first positions were as an organist, and his first major works were for the organ. His early works were influenced by Buxtehude. In his Weimar period, he arranged several of Vivaldi's concertos for keyboard, learned the Italian style, and adopted many aspects of Vivaldi's forms and styles in his own compositions. From Italian, French, and German elements he forged his own distinctive style.

B. The Preludes and Fugues

Some of Bach's organ toccatas intersperse fugue and toccata sections, but more common are works with separate fugues. Some fugues have more than one subject and more than one section. Most of Bach's important organ preludes and fugues date from his Weimar years, with some from Cothen and Leipzig.

C. Bach's Trio Sonatas

Bach adapted the Italian trio sonata to the organ in his six trio sonatas for organ composed in Leipzig.

D. The Chorale Preludes

Bach wrote about 170 chorale settings for organ, using all current types of setting. His *Orgelbuchlein* (*Little Organ Book*), compiled at Weimar and Cothen, contains short chorale preludes in which the chorale is heard once, usually in the soprano. Ordinarily the chorale is unadorned, although some are embellished or treated in canon. In some chorale preludes, visual images in the chorale texts are suggested by appropriate figures in the accompaniment. In addition to their practical use for church services, Bach also intended these chorale preludes as teaching pieces for organists. Bach dedicated the *Orgelbuchlein* and many other works to the glory of God and made no distinction between sacred and secular music. He also made three later compilations of chorale settings for organ, which are longer and more varied in type than his earlier settings.

E. The Harpsichord and Clavichord Music

Bach wrote for all genres of harpsichord and clavichord music of his time. Most of his clavier works were written at Cothen and Leipzig. The intermingling of Italian, French, and German elements is prominent in these works.

F. The Toccatas There are several notable toccatas for the clavier.

G. The Well-Tempered Clavier

Bach's best-known work for harpsichord or clavichord is The Well-Tempered Clavier (Book I, cat 1722; Book II, cat 1740), two cycles of 24 preludes and fugues in all 12 major and minor keys in rising chromatic order from C to B. Both sets demonstrate the usability of all keys with equal or near-equal temperament. Book I is a teaching manual in offering diverse technical challenges to the player, exemplifying numerous genres and forms in the preludes, and using a variety of approaches in the fugues. Book II includes pieces from many different periods in Bach's life.

H. The Clavier Suites

Bach wrote three sets of six suites each, the English Suites (Weimar, cat 1715), the French Suites (in the Clavierbuchlein, Cothen, 1722-25), and the six Partitas (1723-1725, collected as Part I of the Clavier-Ubung). All contain the standard four dances with additions; furthermore, the English Suites begin with preludes, and each of the partitas begins with a different kind of introductory movement.

I. Goldberg Variations

The Goldberg Variations (published 1741 or 1742 as part IV of the Clavier-Ubung) is a set of 30 variations on a sarabande. The variations are in groups of three, with the last of each group a canon; the interval of imitation grows from a unison in variation 3 to a ninth in variation 27. The last variation is a quodlibet, followed by a reprise of the theme. The non-canonic variations are of many types.

J. Works for Solo Violin and Cello

Bach wrote six sonatas and partitas for unaccompanied violin, six suites for cello alone, and a partita for solo flute. These works suggest a polyphonic texture by using multiple stops or jumping back and forth between implied independent lines.

K. Ensemble Sonatas

Bach wrote sets of sonatas for violin and harpsichord, viola da gamba and harpsichord, and flute and harpsichord. Most have four movements, slow-fast-slow-fast, like a sonata da chiesa, and most are like trio sonatas, with the right hand of the harpsichord providing the

other solo instrument while the left hand supplies the continuo.

L. Concertos

Bach composed a set of six concertos for the Margrave of Brandenburg in 1721. These follow Italian models, but expand the form. He also wrote violin concertos and was perhaps the first to write or arrange concertos for one or more harpsichords and orchestra.

M. The Orchestral Suites Bach wrote four orchestral suites, or ouvertures.

N. Other Works

Two works are surveys of musical possibilities. A Musical Offering (1747) is based on a theme by King Frederick the Great of Prussia, on which Bach improvised while visiting the king; the finished work shows the possibilities of the theme by setting it in two ricercares, a trio sonata, and ten canons. The Art of Fugue (1749-50) sums up the fugue in a series of 18 canons and fugues of increasing complexity, all based on the same subject.

VI. Bach's Vocal Music

A. Bach at Leipzig

As cantor in Leipzig, Bach was responsible for the music at St. Thomas's and St. Nicholas's churches and for teaching Latin and music in the St. Thomas's school. Each Sunday, Bach directed a cantata, alternating between the two churches. The service also included a motet, a Lutheran Mass (Kyrie and Gloria), and chorales, using a choir of at least twelve singers (three for each part).

B. The Church Cantatas

For his orchestra, Bach drew on the school, town musicians, and the university's collegium musicum. The cantata followed the Gospel reading in the liturgy and often was related in subject. Bach composed four complete cycles of cantatas for the church year (1723-29), plus cantatas for various occasions such as weddings. About 200 cantatas survive, representing a variety of forms and approaches.

C. Neumeister Cantatas

Bach set five cantata texts by Erdmann Neumeister and was deeply affected by his combination of chorale verses, Bible passages,

and new poetry. In his cantatas, Bach frequently combined secular genres such as French overture, recitative, and da capo aria with chorale settings.

D. Chorale Cantatas

Bach's cantatas use chorales in various ways. The cantata *Christ lag in Todes Banden*, BWV 4, elaborates the chorale in a different way in each of its seven movements. More frequently, Bach based the opening chorus on a chorale and ended with the chorale in simple four-part harmony, with independent solos and duets and an occasional chorale setting in between. For example, *Wachet auf ruft uns die Stimme*, BWV 140, sets the first verse of the chorale in an elaborate chorus, the second for tenor solo, and the third in simple harmonization; in between each chorale verse and the next are a recitative and duet whose words and music are not derived from the chorale.

E. The Secular Cantatas

Bach also wrote secular cantatas for various occasions. In some he experimented with the newer operatic style. Some were reworked as church cantatas.

F. Motets

A motet in Bach's time was a sacred choral work, usually in contrapuntal style, without obligatory instrumental accompaniment. Bach's six surviving motets were written for special occasions, and some use chorale texts or melodies. Bach also wrote a Magnificat and the Christmas Oratorio, a set of six cantatas for the Christmas and Epiphany season with the Bible story in recitative, and arias and chorales that comment on the story.

G. Passions

The high points of Bach's church music are his *St. John Passion* (1724) and *St. Matthew Passion* (1727), settings of the Passion story from the Gospels of John and Matthew respectively that were performed during Good Friday services. In both, the Bible story is narrated by the tenor soloist, with characters played by other soloists and the crowd by the chorus. Chorales, recitatives, and arias are interpolated as commentary on the story.

H. Mass in B Minor

Bach's *Mass in B Minor* was assembled in 1747-49 from some existing and some newly composed movements. It includes styles from

stile antico and *cantus firmus* to the modern galant style. It is not a practical Mass, in view of its size, and Bach may have intended it as a universal statement of religious feeling.

E. The Operas

Handel's operas were among the most successful of his time and were produced in Germany and Italy as well as in London. His operas' plots were freely adapted from history and literature, and the music consists largely of recitatives to forward the action and arias that reflect on the characters' feelings. Handel's operas include a wide variety of aria types. His *Giulio Cesare* (1724) is judged one of his masterpieces, and *Serse* (1738) is a later work in a lighter, more modern style.

F. The Oratorios

Handel's oratorios use recitatives and arias, as does opera, and these are similar in style to opera. But Handel and his librettists also incorporated elements from the English masque and choral anthem, the German *historia*, and French and ancient Greek drama. The oratorios were in English and often based on Old Testament stories, which appealed to a broader audience than the Italian language and the historical or mythological plots of opera. The prominence of the chorus in his oratorios is indebted to choral music in both Germany and England.

G. Choral Style

Handel's choruses often comment on the action, as in a Greek drama or German *Passion*. At other times, the chorus participates in the action. He often uses musical figures to depict images in the text or convey a feeling. His choral style was simpler and less contrapuntal than Bach's, but perhaps more dramatic in his use of contrasting textures.

H. Handel's Borrowings

Handel frequently borrowed and reworked material from his own earlier music and from other composers. At this time, borrowing, transcribing, and reworking were universally accepted practices. When Handel borrowed, he "repaid with interest," using the borrowed material in new and more ingenious ways.

I. Summary Handel was the first composer whose music endured after his death in an unbroken tradition of performance, particularly

in his oratorios. His music's simpler texture, emphasis on melody, grandiose choruses, interest in contrast, and appeal to middle-class audiences suited the taste of the late 18th century and laid the foundation for his permanent place in the repertory.