

Baroque Music

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Baroque music is Western [classical music](#) from the [Baroque](#) era, after the [Renaissance music](#) era and before the [Classical music era](#) proper. This roughly covers the time period from [Claudio Monteverdi](#) (1567-1643) through [Johann Sebastian Bach](#) (1685-1750). Baroque music forms a major portion of the classical music canon and is widely performed and enjoyed.

Among the great composers of the early Baroque were Monteverdi and [Heinrich Schütz](#) (1585 - 1672). In the middle baroque the most influential composers include [Jean-Baptiste Lully](#) (1632-1687), [Arcangelo Corelli](#) (1653-1713), and [Henry Purcell](#) (1659 - 1695). In the late Baroque, the leading figures include [Bach](#) (1685-1750), [George Frideric Handel](#) (1685-1759), [Georg Philipp Telemann](#) (1681-1767), [Domenico Scarlatti](#) (1685-1757), and [Antonio Vivaldi](#) (1678-1741).

Baroque style

Music conventionally described as Baroque encompasses a wide range of styles from a wide geographic region, mostly in Europe, composed during a period of approximately 150 years. The term "Baroque" as applied to music is a relatively recent development, first being used by [Curt Sachs](#) in [1919](#), and only acquiring currency in English in the [1940s](#). Indeed, as late as [1960](#) there was still considerable dispute in academic circles as to whether it was meaningful to lump together music as diverse as that of [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.

Baroque versus Renaissance style

Baroque music shares with Renaissance music a heavy use of [polyphony](#) and [counterpoint](#). However, its use of these techniques differs from Renaissance music. In the Renaissance, harmony is more the result of consonances incidental to the smooth flow of polyphony, while in the early Baroque era the order of these consonances becomes important, for they begin to be felt as chords in a hierarchical, [functional](#) tonal scheme. Around [1600](#) there is considerable blurring of this definition: for example one can see essentially tonal progressions around cadential points in madrigals, while in early [monody](#) the feeling of tonality is still rather tenuous. Another distinction between Renaissance and Baroque practice in harmony is the frequency of chord root motion by [third](#) in the earlier period, while motion of [fourths](#) or [fifths](#) predominates later (which partially defines functional tonality). In addition, Baroque music uses longer lines and stronger rhythms: the initial line is extended, either alone or [accompanied](#) only by the [basso continuo](#), until the theme reappears in another voice. In this later approach to counterpoint, the harmony was more often defined either by the basso continuo, or tacitly by the notes of the theme itself.

These stylistic differences mark the transition from the [ricercars](#), [fantasias](#), and [canzonas](#) of the Renaissance to the [fugue](#), a defining Baroque form. [Monteverdi](#) called this newer, looser style the *seconda prattica*, contrasting it with the *prima prattica* that characterized the [motets](#) and other sacred [choral](#) pieces of high Renaissance masters like [Palestrina](#). Monteverdi himself used both styles; he wrote his [Mass](#) *In illo tempore* in the older, Palestrinan style, and his [1610 Vespers](#) in the new style.

There are other, more general differences between Baroque and Renaissance style. Baroque music often strives for a greater level of emotional intensity than Renaissance music, and a Baroque piece often uniformly depicts a single particular emotion (exultation, grief, piety, etc.) (see [doctrine of the affections](#)). Baroque music was more often written for virtuoso singers and instrumentalists, and is characteristically harder to perform than Renaissance music, although idiomatic instrumental writing was one of the most important innovations of the period. Baroque music employs a great deal of [ornamentation](#), which was often improvised by the performer. Instruments came to play a greater part in Baroque music, and [a cappella](#) vocal music receded in importance.

Baroque versus Classical style

In Classical music, which followed the Baroque, the role of counterpoint was diminished (albeit repeatedly rediscovered and reintroduced; see [fugue](#)), and replaced by a [homophonic](#) texture. The role of ornamentation lessened. Works tended towards a more articulated internal structure, especially those written in [sonata form](#). Modulation (changing of keys) became a structural and dramatic element, so that a work could be heard as a kind of dramatic journey through a sequence of musical keys, outward and back from the tonic. Baroque music also modulates frequently, but the modulation has less structural importance. Works in the classical style often depict widely varying emotions within a single movement, whereas Baroque works tend toward a single, vividly portrayed feeling. Lastly, Classical works usually reach a kind of dramatic climax and then resolve it; Baroque works retain a fairly constant level of dramatic energy to the very last note.

Genres of Baroque music

Baroque composers wrote in many different musical genres. [Opera](#), invented in the late Renaissance, became an important musical form during the Baroque, with the operas of [Alessandro Scarlatti](#) (1660-1725), Handel, and others. The [oratorio](#) achieved its peak in the work of Bach and Handel; opera and oratoria often used very similar music forms, such as a widespread use of the [da capo aria](#).

In other religious music, the [mass](#) and [motet](#) receded slightly in importance, but the [cantata](#) flourished in the work of Bach and other Protestant composers. Virtuoso organ music also flourished, with [toccatas](#), [fugues](#), and other works.

Instrumental [sonatas](#) and [dance suites](#) were written for individual instruments, for chamber groups, and for (small) orchestra. The [concerto](#) emerged, both in its form for a single soloist plus orchestra and as the [concerto grosso](#), in which a small group of soloists

is contrasted with the full ensemble. The [French overture](#), with its contrasting slow and fast sections, added grandeur to the many courts at which it was performed.

Keyboard works were sometimes written largely for the pleasure and instruction of the performer. These included a series of works by the mature Bach that are widely considered to be the intellectual culmination of the Baroque era: the [Well-Tempered Clavier](#), the [Goldberg Variations](#), and [The Art of Fugue](#).

Other important features of Baroque music

- [basso continuo](#) - a kind of continuous accompaniment notated with a new music notation system, [figured bass](#)
- [Monody](#) - music for one melodic voice with [accompaniment](#)
- [Homophony](#) - music with one melodic voice and rhythmically similar accompaniment (this and monody are contrasted with the typical Renaissance [texture](#), [polyphony](#))
- text over music - intelligible text with humble (not overpowering) instrumental accompaniment
- vocal soloists ('bel canto')
- dramatic musical expression
- new instrumental techniques, like [tremolo](#) and [pizzicato](#)
- new musical forms like [opera](#), *drama per musica*
- clear and linear [melody](#)
- the [aria](#)
- the *ritornello* aria (repeated short instrumental interruptions of vocal passages)
- virtuosity
- the 'stile [concertato](#)' (contrast in sound between orchestra and solo-instruments or small groups of instruments)
- idiomatic instrumental writing: better use of the unique properties of each type of [musical instrument](#)
- [ornamentation](#)
- development to modern Western tonality ([major](#) and [minor scales](#))