

BAROQUE 1600-1750

HISTORICAL THEMES

The increasing importance of scientific investigation

Scientists such as Galileo Galilei (1564-1622) and Isaac Newton (1642-1727) broke away from the older model of science, whose purpose was the proof of an *a priori* assumption. Instead, through observation and experimentation, scientists devised hypotheses **about why things happened**.

The culmination of royal despotism

A small group of leaders (kings, queens, and emperors) wielded enormous power in Europe. Such was their power that Louis XIV (1638-1715) was to declare, "L'état ç'est moi" ("**I am the state**").

Development of the New World

The English, French and Spanish holdings in the New World continued to supply Europe with wealth. But as the generations passed, **colonists began to feel a growing allegiance to their new homes**. Ultimately, such feelings would lead to the independence of these lands.

Artificiality and marvelous effect were valued in the arts

Sculptors, building on the techniques of artists such as Giovanni Bernini (1598-1680), found ways **to create the illusion of energetic and even violent movement** in their works. Painters created larger and more crowded canvases. **Virtuosity was highly prized** in all the arts.

MUSICAL CONTEXT

A Time of Experimentation

- Musicians embraced the idea that **music could move the listener** in a real and physical way.
- Opera, with its blend of music and drama, was the full realization of this ideal.
- In instrumental music, no less than in opera, composers **experimented with ways of creating impressive effects**.

Expanding Roles for Music

- Music continued to be used as an important tool of statecraft.
- The new and extravagant styles **served as a rich adornment to religious services** in both Catholic and Protestant traditions.
- Music, especially opera, was as an important source of entertainment to the growing merchant and landed classes.

A Growing Awareness of National Styles

- **Distinct styles** of both vocal and instrumental music developed in **Italy, France and Germany**.
- Composers were aware of these differences and made use of them in their music. A French composer, for example, might label a piece "In the Italian Style".
- **The question of the superiority** of various styles was often the **subject of heated debate**.

The Full Equality of Instrumental Music

- New instrumental forms, such as the **concerto and sonata** developed.
- Instrument makers created new types of instruments (especially wind instruments).
- The **violin** moved to center stage as the **most important** string instrument.
- **Performers reached new heights** of expression and technique. Virtuoso players (such as Archangelo Corelli and Antonio Vivaldi) reflected these abilities in their own compositions.
- Even in vocal music, **instruments** played an important role. Instruments not only served as accompaniment, but **often played equal roles with the voices**.

MUSICAL STYLE

- The *basso continuo* is ever-present in Baroque music.
- Textures are primarily melody and accompaniment or **contrapuntal**.
- Voices and instruments were **freely mixed**.
- Newly developed instruments provided a rich palette of tone color.
- Rhythms are often derived from dance rhythms.
- **Melodies are ornate** and often make use of dramatic leaps.
- Harmony is based on major/minor tonality, and **dissonances become more common**.
- Repetition and **simple** binary and ternary **forms** provide the basis for musical structure.

COMPOSERS

ANTONIO VIVALDI

Born: March 4, 1678. Venice, Italy

Died: July 28, 1741. Vienna, Austria

Italian composer of instrumental music and opera. He was important in the development of the concerto.



Visitors to Venice in the early eighteenth century often made a point of attending one of the regular concerts given by the orchestra of the Ospedale della Pietà. Here they would hear a group of girls and young women (orphans supported by the organization) playing with "all the gracefulness and precision imaginable." The concerts would spotlight various members of the orchestra (sometimes highlighting unusual combinations of instruments) and the music would often be by the leading composer of the city, Antonio Vivaldi.

GEORGE FRIDERIC HANDEL

Born: February 23, 1685. Halle, Germany

Died: April 14, 1759. London, England

English composer, German by birth. Composed in all genres, but primarily remembered for his operas and oratorios.



JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH

Born: March 21, 1685. Eisenach, Germany

Died: July 28, 1750. Leipzig, Germany

In his own words...

"Whereas the Honorable and Most Wise Council of this Town of Leipzig have engaged me as Cantor of the St. Thomas School... I shall set the boys a shining example... serve the school industriously... bring the music in both the principal churches of this town into good estate... faithfully instruct the boys not only in vocal but also in instrumental music... arrange the music so that it shall not last too long, and shall... not make an operatic impression, but rather incite the listeners to devotion... treat the boys in a friendly manner and with caution, but, in case they do not wish to obey, chastise them with moderation or report them to the proper place."

