

## Baroque

Claude V. Palisca

<https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.02097>

**Published in print:** 20 January 2001

**Published online:** 2001

A term used generally to designate a period or style of European music covering roughly the years between 1600 and 1750.

### 1. Etymology and early usage.

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Although used in art and music criticism as far back as the mid-18th century, the term 'Baroque' has only relatively recently been adopted for a historical period. It is derived from the French *baroque*, which comes from the Portuguese *barroco*, meaning a pearl of irregular or bulbous shape. It is often found in texts having to do with the manufacture of jewellery from the 16th century onwards, in Spanish (*berrueco*, *barrueco*), French (*barroque*, *barrocque*, *baroque*) and later Italian (*baroco*, *barocco*).

It has been generally assumed that the word was first applied to the fine arts in reference to architecture. Charles de Brosses in *Lettres familières écrites d'Italie en 1739 et 1740* (Paris, c 1755; ed. R. Colomb, Paris, 1855) criticized the architect of a Roman palace for transferring to a large scale the style of baroque ornamentation that better suited small objects like gold cases or dinnerware. But it has been shown that these 'letters' were not drafted until about 1755, long after de Brosses' return to Paris. The earliest application to the fine arts appears to have been, rather, in reference to music. This occurs in a satirical letter prompted by the première of Rameau's *Hippolyte et Aricie* in Paris in October 1733, printed in the *Mercure de France* in May 1734 ('Lettre de M\*\*\* à Mlle\*\*\* sur l'origine de la musique', pp.868–70). The anonymous author covertly implied that what was new in the opera was 'du barocque' and complained that the music lacked coherent melody, was unsparing in dissonances, constantly changed key and metre, and speedily ran through every compositional device. Rameau was also the target of a poem by J.B. Rousseau (in a letter to Louis Racine, 17 November 1739, in *Lettres sur différents sujets de la littérature*, Geneva, 1750) that called him and his kind 'distillers of baroque chords' (*distillateurs d'accords baroques*).

Noel Antoine Pluche was the most illuminating of the early users of the term. He not only attached it to a category or style of music but he implied an etymology. In *Spectacle de la nature* (vii, Paris, 1746) he maintained that the comparison of French and Italian music no

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longer divided critics; that the issue now was between the partisans of *musique chantante* (songful or tuneful music) and *musique baroque* (translated as 'rough' in the English version, *Spectacle de la nature: or Nature Display'd*, London, 1748):

One takes its melody from the natural sounds of our throat and from the accents of the human voice, which speaks to concern others with what touches us, always without grimace, always without effort, almost without art. We shall call this songful music [*la musique chantante*]. The other aims to surprise by the boldness of its sounds and passes for song while pulsating with speed and noise [*veut surprendre par la hardiesse des sons & passer pour chanter en mesurant des vitesses & du bruit*]; we call it Baroque music [*la musique Barroque*].

Pluche had earlier contrasted the concerts directed by Jean-Pierre Guignon (1702–74), who amused and surprised with the admirable lightness and agility of his playing and of the ensembles he directed, and Jean-Baptiste Anet, who did not approve of Guignon's pretence at overcoming all difficulties, of his tendency to 'wrest laboriously from the bottom of the sea some baroque pearls, when diamonds can be found on the surface of the earth' (p.103). To Anet, achieving surprise by brilliant vivacity was a small accomplishment; greatness in art was to please the multitude by sweet and varied emotions. He preferred an instrumental sound 'that was connected, sustained, velvety, passionate, and conforming to the accents of the human voice' (p.104). Pluche's favourite composer was Mondonville, who excelled in both the singing and the Baroque genres. Essentially, however, Baroque music was to Pluche pure instrumental music which, lacking a text, had no significance, not even that which it might acquire through imitating the human voice. For Pluche, as for de Brosses, *baroque* had a pejorative connotation.

Although Guignon was a composer in his own right, Pluche probably thought of him rather as the most famous interpreter of Italian concertos, such as those of Vivaldi and Albinoni, at the Concert Spirituel in the 1720s. Marpurg also contrasted his playing with Anet's: 'Guignon and Battiste were two fine violinists; the first played in the Italian taste, the second in the French taste' (*Historisch-kritische Beyträge zur Aufnahme der Musik*, i, Berlin, 1754, p.238). The brilliant and bold virtuosity that Pluche associated with Guignon probably reflected the music of Vivaldi's 'high Baroque' period and similar works unknown in Paris before the first years of the Concert Spirituel (which began in 1725). Pluche's use of the term 'baroque', while not entirely inconsistent with its present usage, thus had much narrower scope.

Other 18th-century writers tended to call upon the word 'baroque' to evoke impressions of strangeness and distortion. De Brosses, who applied the term to the pseudo-Gothic ornamentation of the Palazzo Doria Pamphili in Rome, was amazed that Italian recitative 'could be

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at one time so baroque and so monotonous' (*Lettres*, ed. R. Colomb, 4/1885, ii, 330). J.-J. Rousseau ventured a definition in his *Dictionnaire de musique* (Paris, 1768): 'A baroque music is that in which the harmony is confused, charged with modulations and dissonances, the melody is harsh and little natural, the intonation difficult, and the movement constrained'; he thought the term came from the *baroco* of logicians. Rousseau's definition was paraphrased by, among others, Castil-Blaze (*Dictionnaire de musique moderne*, Paris, 1821), Heinrich Koch (*Musikalisches Lexikon*, Frankfurt, 1802), Gustav Schilling (*Encyclopädie der gesammten musikalischen Wissenschaften*, i, Stuttgart, 1835) and Hermann Mendel (*Musikalisches Conversations-Lexikon*, Berlin, 1870).

Rousseau's etymology, now largely discredited, was vigorously supported by Benedetto Croce (1929) and later René Wellek (1946). *Baroco* was indeed a word coined by medieval logicians along with *Celarent*, *Baralipon*, *Darapti*, *Felapto* etc. as mnemonic aids to recall the various types of syllogism; the fourth mode of the second figure was called *baroco*. The vowel 'a' indicated the universal affirmative character of the major premise, and the two vowels 'o' indicated that the minor premises and conclusion were negative, as in 'Every A is B; some C are not B; hence some C are not A'. *Baroco*, however, was not used in Italy as an art-critical term; when Italians eventually wrote about Baroque qualities in art, the French word was borrowed, and it became *barocco*.

Baroque in the sense of bizarre, irregular and extravagant continued to occur sporadically in criticism of art and music in the rest of the 18th century and most of the 19th without acquiring a more generalized stylistic significance. It was Jacob Burckhardt who gave the post-Michelangelo style this name in his *Der Cicerone* (Leipzig, 2/1839), where he dedicated a substantial chapter to the *Barockstyl*. Whereas for Burckhardt it marked the decadent phase of the high Renaissance, Heinrich Wölfflin (*Renaissance und Barock*, 1888) treated the style and its development in a positive way and suggested the term might also be applied to literature (Tasso) and music (Palestrina). Cornelius Gurlitt's *Geschichte des Barockstiles in Italien* (Stuttgart, 1887) also accepted the style as a legitimate expression of its time. Wölfflin later expanded the concept of Baroque to include a number of principles that could be applied to any period, though his examples were mainly 17th century (see below; *Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, Munich, 1915).

Meanwhile the concept of Baroque was not immediately adopted by writers on music history. Ambros (1882) mentioned the rampant *barrocco* of painting and architecture in the 17th century (*Geschichte der Musik*, iv, rev. 3/1909, p.286) but not as a musical category. Riemann avoided the term, calling the period 'Generalbass-Zeitalter' (*Handbuch der Musikgeschichte*, ii, 1912), and Guido Adler referred to it simply as the 'Third Style Period' (*Handbuch der Musikgeschichte*, 1924).

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Curt Sachs was the first to apply Wölfflin's theory of the Baroque systematically to music. He took the five characteristics that Wölfflin had isolated in the visual arts and explained how each fitted musical developments in this period: (i) the suppression of line in favour of the painterly (*malerisch*) was paralleled by the overwhelming of melody by ornamentation and variation; (ii) the penchant of Baroque painters for placing figures in both foreground and recessed positions as opposed to the single plane of the Renaissance was compared by Sachs to the depth achieved by placing a soprano against a bass and its harmony; and (iii) the drift from the closed form of the Renaissance to the open form of Baroque art was analogous to the replacement of the rhythmic dominated by arsis and thesis by the natural declamation of speech. Similarly, the tendencies of Baroque art (iv) to replace multiplicity by unity and (v) to obscure rather than make clear were shown to operate also in music.

Sachs's belief in the synchronism of the arts and his rather strained transplantation of Wölfflin's categories were almost immediately challenged. Andrea Della Corte (1933), a follower of Croce, argued that the term 'Baroque' could not transcend its meaning of extravagant, and thus only certain aspects of 17th-century music could be characterized by it – the 'marvellous' monumental polychoral style of Benevoli, which 'Barochized' Renaissance polyphony, the tortuous turns of the late madrigal, or the overschematization of opera after 1650. Moreover, Della Corte pointed out, Wölfflin's poles for the Renaissance and Baroque could be turned round completely and the concept of linear applied with no strain to monody and that of closed form to the da capo aria.

Robert Haas (1928) saw merits in Wölfflin's principles but doubted whether all five points could be applied to music; he was also less concerned with paralleling the chronology of the visual arts. Whereas art historians pushed the beginnings of the Baroque back to the middle or even the beginning of the 16th century, Haas could not justify a date earlier than 1594, the year Palestrina and Lassus died. He did recognize, however, a certain spiritual unity in the period, and defended it on sociological, intellectual and cultural as well as musical grounds.

It was Lang (1941) and Bukofzer (1940, 1947) who gave the term 'Baroque' currency in English. Lang did not discuss the concept or the word in themselves but elaborated with a wealth of detail the forces at work culturally, intellectually and socially that led to the 'fading' of the Renaissance and rise of the Baroque style in art and music. Bukofzer used the terms 'Renaissance' and 'Baroque' 'as convenient labels for periods which apply equally well to music history and other fields of civilization' (1947, p.2). He recognized the dangers of transposing the terminology of art history to music: 'The concepts of Wölfflin, the linear, closed form, etc., are abstractions distilled from the live development of art, indeed very useful abstractions, but so general in nature that they can be applied to all periods indiscriminately, although they were originally found in the

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comparison of renaissance and baroque'. For Bukofzer the value of the term lay in the observation that it 'essentially denotes the inner stylistic unity of the period. By technical analysis rather than comparative abstractions it is possible to show that the development of baroque music runs parallel with that of baroque art, but there are undercurrents that do not conform to the "spirit of the time"'.

Independently of Bukofzer, Clercx (1948) arrived at an autonomously musical analysis of the Baroque in music. She too doubted that theories based on the plastic arts and literature could necessarily be adapted to music, 'which has its own laws and its independent development. A study of the Baroque in music, bringing with it new facts, could be of such a nature as to modify the conception that has generally been held of the phenomenon' (p.39). Through a careful analysis of the characteristics of melody, harmony, rhythm and genres of the repertory of the period from the middle of the 16th century, she developed the aesthetic principles on which the variety of works of the period could be said to have been founded. By 'esthétique' Clercx meant not the body of aesthetic philosophy generated by the period itself but the principles that could be induced from an analysis of its products and then be referred back to that period.

Scholars in France and Britain were long reluctant to accept the term 'Baroque' or concepts associated with it. Dufourcq (1961) pointed out that the concept of Baroque as common in German musicology did not fit the development of music and culture in France, where Classicism occupied the first half of the 17th century. Chailley (1958) rejected the term as failing to correspond to any reality. In Britain, Capell (*Grove*<sup>5</sup>) found no justification beyond mere convenience for calling such a variety of styles as those of Peri and Bach by the same term. The *Histoire de la musique* of the *Encyclopédie de la Pléiade* (Paris, 1960) called the period 'L'ère du style concertant'.

The idea of a Baroque style gained some acceptance in France, however, as shown by the studious attention given to it by V.L. Tapié (1957) and Rémy Stricker (1968). In Britain the term appeared in a book title, *The Baroque Concerto* (London, 1961) by Arthur Hutchings, although the concept hardly figures in the text, which merely accepts the notion of a Baroque style and period.

## 2. Chronological limits.

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There has been appreciable disagreement concerning the starting date of the period, less about the terminal date. Wölfflin recognized in art history an early phase from 1570, a high phase from 1680, and a late phase extending from about 1700 until the rise of the 'Sturm und Drang'. Haas divided his book into three parts, each covering about half a century, and framing the achievement of the main components of the Baroque style: the conquest over the musical Renaissance (the monodic and concertato style); the melodic

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structuring of the musical Baroque (the cantata and bel canto style); and the musical high Baroque (the formation of the 'proud' contrapuntal style, *kontrapunktischer Prunkstil*).

Bukofzer distinguished three major periods, though he acknowledged that they did not coincide in different countries: 1580–1630, early Baroque; 1630–80, middle Baroque; 1680–1730, late Baroque. Clercx pushed the beginning of the period back to the middle of the 16th century, where she located a phase of 'primitive Baroque'. The second period, 'full Baroque' (*plein baroque*), occupied the entire 17th century. Finally after the style was achieved there was a 'tardy Baroque' (*baroque tardif*), which extended from 1700 to about 1740 or 1765.

### 3. Critique of the concept.

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It is evident that the earliest usages of 'Baroque' in the arts, though suggestive, cannot be a guide to its meaning as a historical category. Nor should the fact that it originally had negative connotations deter us from assigning to it a positive meaning. For, if its pejorative taint stands against it, the critical vocabulary would have to be impoverished by banning also terms such as 'Gothic', 'impressionism', 'mannerism' and 'galant'. But unless the period designated 'Baroque' can be shown to have some stylistic or spiritual unity, the term is ineligible even as a convenient label. The question, therefore, is whether within a sizable period between the Renaissance and the middle of the 18th century a quality or qualities can be identified that strongly dominated musical style.

Various traits have been suggested: dynamism, open form, degree of ornamentation, sharp contrast, co-existence of diverse styles, individualism, affective representation and numerous others. Most of these qualities, while they may contrast with the Renaissance, do not hold for any extended period. Although the style of Gesualdo is dynamic and open-formed, that of Alessandro Scarlatti is not. While Caccini's music is ornamented, Corelli's fundamentally is not (although it sometimes invited ornamentation); besides, the style of the 1740s or 1770s was also ornamented. The sharp contrasts observed in the late sacred concertos of Gabrieli are less striking or at least appear normal in an opera of Cesti. Diverse styles have co-existed in many periods, if perhaps less in the Renaissance. Individualism became even more pronounced in the later 18th century than it was in the 17th. These qualities have served mainly to distinguish from the Renaissance the style that immediately succeeded it. They are less useful to delimit the Baroque or to distinguish it from subsequent styles.

Only one of the general characteristics mentioned survives an analysis of 17th- and 18th-century music and musical thought: the attitude towards affective expression. From the 1540s to at least the 1720s composers in a preponderant share of their music strove for the expression of affective states, whether or not inspired by a text.

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It is this striving that led to the extravagances that were first deplored as 'Baroque'. Irregularity, amplification, strangeness and grotesqueness, qualities inherent in the word, were often the very products of the search for expression. Anyone who did not understand the motivation behind these manners (like a Frenchman listening to Italian recitative or Vivaldi's violin concertos) could well have found a work embodying them bizarre.

The movement to express the affections was based on the recognition of the existence of distinguishable states of mind or feeling, such as sorrow, admiration, gladness, fear, anger, hope, joy or calm. These were thought to be accompanied by physical conditions that reached a certain stability in the person seized by the passion. This preoccupation with the passions was stimulated by several factors: the revival in the 16th century of the rhetorical treatises of Aristotle, Quintilian and Cicero, which not only described the passions but urged the orator's obligation to stir them; by the renewed reading of the *Poetics* of Aristotle, which emphasized the arousal of pity and fear and the imitation of human actions and passions; and by the general atmosphere of tolerance of the passions, which earlier had been seen as weaknesses of the flesh, and appreciation for the innate value of deep feeling.

Although the urge for expression of the affections persisted throughout the period under consideration, the means by which it was achieved were continually changing. Poets first set the example by paying more attention to emotional expression, and musicians adopted the moving of the passions as their principal objective. This is already evident in the school of Willaert; his own *Musica nova*, compiled in the early 1540s though published in 1559, may be considered the watershed that parts the Renaissance from the beginning of a new stylistic era, the Baroque, if one so wishes to call it. Side by side with works that are exemplary of Renaissance classicism are a few pieces, like *Aspro core*, that point in new directions. Several pupils of Willaert, particularly Cipriano de Rore and Nicola Vicentino, became the fountainheads of the new idiom. Monteverdi gave to the new style a name, *seconda pratica*. Certain more recent critics have called the 16th-century phase 'mannerism', but that term is better reserved for the rhetorical style of for example Marenzio in the madrigal and Lassus in the motet, a style often more concerned with illusionistic images than with affective expression.

Better understanding of physiology, particularly the circulation of the blood and the action of the nerves, spelt the downfall of the affections in the 18th century. At the same time musical artists became disillusioned with the mechanization that the process of affective expression underwent in Italian opera. A new conception of the emotions as fleeting, constantly shifting and conflicting reactions of the mind and body to internal, external and imaginary stimuli, as exemplified by the association psychology of David Hume and David Hartley, took the place of the *Affektenlehre* (see Rhetoric and music, §I, 4). The shift is reflected in the practice of Italian composers from

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about 1730 and can also be documented in the attitudes of critics. Daniel Webb (*Observations in the Correspondence between Poetry and Music*, London, 1769, p.47) observed that the arousal of feelings by music is 'not, as some have imagined, the results of any fixed or permanent condition of the nerves and spirits, but springs from a succession of impressions, and is greatly augmented by sudden or gradual transitions from one kind of strain of vibrations to another'. The music of the 1730s and 1740s by Pergolesi, Hasse and Jommelli, for example, no longer relied on the static passions of the preceding decades but exploited the possibilities of dynamic flux and transition of sentiment. The advent of the sentimental style, which Pluche heralded as the 'musique chantante', marked the end of the period under consideration.

Thus the two centuries between roughly 1540 and 1730 can legitimately be considered an artistic era united by a common ideal, and, if one must find a word for it, 'Baroque' is defensible as a designation. Adoption of the term should not obscure the fact that there is no unity of either idiom or creative directions in this period. Not only do Renaissance practices (and in that sense the Renaissance) continue through much of the 16th century, but the ideals that can be embraced in the concept of Baroque reigned in parts of Europe as late as 1750, while elsewhere a counter-Baroque reaction had set in.

Whether the chronological limits and spirit of the Baroque in music coincide with those in other arts – painting, sculpture, architecture, theatre, literature, dance – can best be determined not by searching for analogies or parallels but by investigating the motivation for certain artistic directions. Perhaps even more important is to recognize the forces that led these arts in common directions. To define these for all the arts is beyond the scope of this article; but some of the forces that shaped Baroque music may be outlined.

The most important stimulus for a new style in the 16th century was Humanism. The new knowledge and aspirations that emanated from the revival of ancient learning affected music in numerous ways. The poetry of Petrarch, itself inspired by that of antiquity, became the model for modern poetry and prompted an intense search for new expressive means for setting it to music. The overthrow of the Boethian theory through the fresh insights offered by Ptolemy and Aristoxenus opened up the recognition of chromatic resources and the possibilities of tonal organization outside the modes. Ancient memories of a music that powerfully affected the feelings and morals of men inspired composers to seek similar effects through polyphonic and, later, monodic music, which was thought to correspond more closely to the ancient. Greek tragedy, which by the interpretation of Aristotle's *Poetics* and other recently studied texts could be shown to have been sung throughout, became a model for a style of music that could be sung on the stage for not just certain lyrical moments, as in Renaissance theatre, but for the entire drama.



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Experimental science, closely linked with humanism in that it began as a testing of the doctrines found in ancient texts, was another important source of new trends. Discovery of the true cause and nature of sound, pitch and pitch relations liberated musical thought from the numerology that had preserved certain myths (such as the sanctity of the number six as the determinant of consonance). This paved the way for equal temperament and intermodulation among a wide circle of keys. The scientific movement also stimulated Rameau to develop a theory that replaced the purely pragmatic chordal systems of thoroughbass figuring.

The influence of the counter-Reformation on the direction music took in the late 16th century has probably been overestimated. But it surely hastened the secularization of church styles through the introduction of motets for solo or few voices and vernacular oratorios that were essentially in the style of the theatre. These styles eventually spread to the Protestant churches of Germany, England and France.

The patronage of music as an instrument of diplomacy intensified during the second half of the 16th century, particularly among the cardinals in Rome and in the Italian principalities of the Medici, Este and Gonzaga families. Meanwhile in mercantile centres such as Venice, Naples, Hamburg and London, opera theatres that depended upon subscribers or leasers of boxes catered for a new middle class. Taste shifted at these centres from the mythological plots favoured at the princely courts to more realistic or historical subjects. Eventually commercial pressure led to the introduction of comic episodes and eventually comic intermezzos, leading to a counter-Baroque idiom that soon spread to instrumental and sacred genres. The growth of the bourgeois class also led to the establishment of musical academies, such as the Accademia Filarmonica of Verona, or in Germany of cadres of musicians hired by town councils to function both in the church and in the secular community and even in the university through a collegium musicum.

Insofar as these and similar underlying conditions for music-making were part of the intellectual and social substratum of artistic activity in general, music shares with the other arts a common source for stylistic change and continuity. It is not surprising, then, that the music of this period reveals certain superficial features that parallel those of artistic products in other media. The similarity of appearances should not, however, be attributed to a 'spirit of the time' – a Baroque *Zeitgeist* – but rather to the common underlying conditions that sometimes express themselves in uncanny resemblances.

A music historian can contribute more to the understanding of the Baroque as a cultural phenomenon by describing faithfully, as Bukofzer and Clercx have done, the technical features of the music of the period than by pursuing abstractions such as linear versus painterly and picturesque, or closed versus open forms.

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## 4. Technical features of Baroque music.

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The thoroughbass, which began as a shorthand to indicate the harmony implied by two outer voices, soon became a constructive device, a means of achieving continuity while leaving the upper voice or voices free to express a text or soar in instrumental fantasies. To define the scope of the Baroque period on the basis of the persistence of the thoroughbass has been challenged on the grounds that the basso continuo persists well into the 1770s, by which time a new style had crystallized. This is not a serious objection, however, because by 1722, when Rameau published his *Traité de l'harmonie*, it was evident that a more complex set of considerations ruled the practice of composers than the counterpoint of the outer parts and its chordal filling. A system of relations between triads in a given key and between those and certain supporting triads from outside the key was implicit in the music being written towards the end of the Baroque period. The thoroughbass after the 1740s was an accompanimental convention, and ceased to have much effect on orchestral or choral texture; indeed, it became a sorely inadequate means of notating the accompaniment to solo voices or instruments.

The wish to prolong the rather manneristic and fleeting expressions of particular passions for longer spans than could be achieved through the recitative or even the arioso passages of the early monodies led to the adoption of the strophic variation and of various extended harmonic patterns, such as the aria della romanesca, Ruggiero, ballo del gran duca, the descending tetrachord and similar ostinatos. These permitted both the prolongation of a reigning affection and the constant renewal of melodic invention and ornamentation. That practice too faded out about the 1740s, to be replaced by variations on closed forms, such as minuets, operatic arias and the like, which find their beginnings but not their ultimate flowering in the *doubles* of Baroque dance suites.

A consequence of the thoroughbass practice was to throw the high-pitched voices into relief: and this produced a texture that persisted from the first decade of the 17th century to the 1740s. One or a pair of treble voices elaborated their lines, often through canonic and imitative or other motivic interplay, over a bass that determined or defined the harmonic motion, while other parts or chordal instruments occupied a subordinate filler role. Such a texture may involve non-treble voices, and several such ensembles may be found to proceed simultaneously with more or less interaction.

A specialization of functions resulted from this texture, some instruments fulfilling a function of harmonic 'stuffing' or *ripieno*, others a solo role. This division of labour, and not the polychoral medium, was the true source of the vocal and instrumental concerto. The 16th-century polychoral idiom and its amplification in the 17th century, which Della Corte identified as a genuine Baroque strain in Italian music, was actually a late survival of the *coro spezzato* technique popular in the Veneto from about 1520. Its true

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significance for the Baroque is that the polychoral texture served as a model for the earliest attempts at writing church music for few solo voices. The division of ripieno and solo functions together with the antiphonal contrasts inspired by polychoral music produced new combinations of solo and tutti vocal and instrumental ensembles. These combinations result in what is sometimes called the 'concertato style' but is really a concertato medium that lent itself to a variety of styles.

Patterns of stylistic decorum emerged, were consolidated and eventually dissolved during this period. Marco Scacchi recognized that, whereas in the earlier music one style and practice dominated, in his age there were three styles, church, chamber and theatre, and two practices, the ancient and modern, later called strict and free (*Breve discorso sopra la musica moderna*, Warsaw, 1649). Particular styles and practices were thought fitting for particular recreational, entertainment or devotional functions. Stylistic decorum did not prevent the borrowing of styles, however, as when the theatre style was introduced into the chamber or church. But when these styles were borrowed, they were subjected to a process of abstraction and conventionalization that purified them of offensive or distracting connotations, as when recitative or aria was admitted into the church, or dances into a chamber sonata. These distinctions tended to dissolve towards the end of the period, and by the mid-18th century a common style emerged that passed freely from genre to genre and from one social usage to another.

The rhythmic practices of Baroque music reflected the conventions of stylistic decorum. The principal schemes of rhythmic organization were founded on the dance and on speech. To these must be added the *alla breve* of the *stile antico*, continued from an earlier age for the sake of religious propriety. While the rhythm of speech ruled the recitative and arioso, the rhythm of dance governed the aria and chorus. Even keyboard genres and violin sonatas were permeated by this dichotomy. The different dances and their metres became the models for characteristic music that evoked certain affections through association and through mysterious affinities that were perceived between feelings and movement.

Most Baroque composers navigated the uncharted waters of pre-tonality. Some, to be sure, continued to be guided by the church modes, but Vincenzo Galilei was probably more observant than prophetic when he celebrated their demise in 1589 (*Il primo libro della prattica del contrapunto intorno all'uso delle consonanze*, ed. F. Remp, Cologne, 1980). The dissolution of the modal system was in fact well under way by the 1530s. The return to a key pitch within a discrete piece replaced the unity of mode, and excursions into closely related keys replaced the admissible cadences of modal polyphony. On the other hand, the constraints that tonal writing began to acquire in the middle of the 18th century did not yet hamper composers in the period. The continuous modulation of the recitatives, the innocence with which keys fluctuated in an opera or

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mass, the inconsistency of modulatory schemes in the concertos: these are evidences of a free exploration of the resources that the new tunings offered.

200 years are a long time in the quickly paced culture of the West. Even the very general characteristics proposed above for the Baroque had to be couched in developmental terms. It is useful, therefore, to divide the period into more homogeneous sub-periods, with the understanding that no border formalities were invoked in passing from one to the other.

The late 16th and early 17th centuries were times of exploration of new resources, such as chromaticism, dissonance, tonality, monody, recitative, and new vocal and instrumental combinations. No consistent approach to composition emerged until about 1640, by which time the new resources were tamed, and a fairly homogeneous style arose in Italy that was to spread everywhere in Europe in the next generation. The period between 1640 and 1690 was a relatively stable one in which genres such as the trio sonata and da capo aria enjoyed a sureness, yet freshness, that has led some to call this a classical phase. From 1690 to 1730 genres such as the aria, concerto and sonata reached an almost overripe elaborateness, and the once spontaneous expression of the affections became formalized, at its worst mechanized. A reaction became inevitable. A new style began to manifest itself in the comic intermezzos to the *opera seria*, more natural in its melody, more varied in its rhythms, simpler yet more moving in its harmonies and, most important, truer to the flow of human sensibilities.

Generalizations of this kind are charged with oversimplifications and admit of abundant exceptions. But there is enough truth to them to make an observer from the vantage point of the 21st century comfortable with the proposition that the period from the late 16th century to 1730 knew some continuity and homogeneity, and that the period might for practical purposes be summed up in a word, 'Baroque'.

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## See also

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Performing practice, §I, 5: Western: 1600 to 1750