

## Affects, theory of the ( Ger. *Affektenlehre*

George J. Buelow

<https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.00253>

**Published in print:** 20 January 2001

**Published online:** 2001

In its German form, a term first employed extensively by German musicologists, beginning with Kretzschmar, Goldschmidt and Schering, to describe in Baroque music an aesthetic concept originally derived from Greek and Latin doctrines of rhetoric and oratory. Just as, according to ancient writers such as Aristotle, Cicero and Quintilian, orators employed the rhetorical means to control and direct the emotions of their audiences, so, in the language of classical rhetoric manuals and also Baroque music treatises, must the speaker (i.e. the composer) move the 'affects' (i.e. emotions) of the listener. It was from this rhetorical terminology that music theorists, beginning in the late 16th century, but especially during the 17th and 18th centuries, borrowed the terminology along with many other analogies between rhetoric and music. The affects, then, were rationalized emotional states or passions. After 1600 composers generally sought to express in their vocal music such affects as were related to the texts, for example sadness, anger, hate, joy, love and jealousy. During the 17th and early 18th centuries this meant that most compositions (or, in the case of longer works, individual sections or movements) expressed only a single affect. Composers in general sought a rational unity that was imposed on all the elements of a work by its affect. No single 'theory' of the affects was, however, established by the theorists of the Baroque period. But beginning with Mersenne and Kircher in the mid-17th century, many theorists, among them Werckmeister, Printz, Mattheson, Marpurg, Scheibe and Quantz, gave over large parts of their treatises to categorizing and describing types of affect as well as the affective connotations of scales, dance movements, rhythms, instruments, forms and styles.

The so-called Figures, theory of musical was closely related to the compositional craft required for the establishing of affects in Baroque music.

*See also* Rhetoric and music.

---

## See also

---

Chromatic

Composition, §7: Works, styles and ideas

Philosophy of music, §II, 5: Baroque thought

Figures, theory of musical

La Feillée, François de

Musicology, §II, 11(i): Disciplines of musicology: Gender & sexual studies: Women in music

Rhetoric and music, §I, 4: Up to 1750: Affects