

# **Baroque and Classical Performance Practice**

**1650-1820**



- ☐ **Why is performance practice important and can we ever truly be "authentic?"**
  - ☐ **Music performed in Leipzig during Bach's tenure was not only "Baroque" but included chants, motets and chorales that reflect hundreds of years worth of tradition**
  - ☐ **Around 1750 the ancient styles became out of fashion in favor of the new "classical" style and many older traditions were abandoned and lost, more so when the expansion of the nineteenth century took hold**
    - ☐ **Multiple versions of Handel's Messiah**
- ☐ **Performance practices are customs or common procedures**
  - ☐ **Ways performers of the time realized elements of the score**
  - ☐ **Baroque performance of Renaissance music was probably more "baroque" than 50-100 years prior**



# Instruments and Performing Forces

- ☐ Mendelssohn's revival of Bach's St. Matthew Passion utilized a choir of 300-400, well beyond scope of Bach's original intentions in Leipzig
  - ☐ Orchestra size and instrumentation not standardized, but Bach's ensembles typically had up to 18 (often as few as one per part), while Corelli's orchestra in Rome had 35-80 for daily performances and could expand for special occasions.
  - ☐ Large ensembles: six first violins, six seconds, three violas, three cellos, two basses (small ensembles had half)
    - ☐ Winds only one per part until Johann Quantz specified an increase (1752)
    - ☐ Messiah in 1758 used large orchestration above with four oboes, four bassoons, two trumpets, two horns
- ☐ Harpsichord almost consistently replaced with the forte-piano until the famous keyboardist, Wanda Landowska, renewed interest in the instrument in the early 1900s
  - ☐ First recording of the Goldberg Variations on harpsichord (1931)
- ☐ Baroque bows shaped differently from bows in the classical era and later, used gut strings, and therefore had much different weight and produced a natural messa di voce
- ☐ Baroque (natural) trumpet was much different and softer than modern trumpets
- ☐ Flexibility governing choice of instruments Throughout 17th c and early-18th c, especially in music with no independent instrument parts or music with only keyboard & continuo and one or two obbligato parts







# Notation and Standardization

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- ☐ No universal standardization of pitch until late 19th and early 20th century; varied significantly by region
  - ☐ Tuning generally centered around A=420 HZ, closer to modern A flat (415 HZ), but could go as high as A=465 (17th c Venice) and as low as A=395 (18th c France); organs could vary by minor third
  - ☐ "Choir pitch" related to sacred performances in church was generally a whole tone higher than "Chamber pitch" in secular performances in courts or theaters
  - ☐ Pitch was high in N Germany and lower in S Germany
  - ☐ Pitch was low in Rome but high in Venice
  - ☐ Pitch in France depended upon whether you were playing chamber music opera or something else, but was higher than in Italy
- ☐ Notation is a language of communication between composer and performers. We must understand what notation meant to the composer at the time
  - ☐ Rhythm patterns were often guides and would be altered slightly in performance
  - ☐ Meter conveyed tempo in addition to patterns of metric accentuation



# Baroque Sound

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- ☐ Without appropriate sound, recommended tempos may seem illogical, prescribed articulations of rhythms may not be feasible, phrasing spaces and altered rhythms may seem exaggerated, ornamentation so may be labored, and expressive nuances may be obscured. Dennis Shrock, Performance Practices in the Baroque Era
- ☐ Timbre represents the subjective or emotional aspect
  - ☐ Most common adjective used in Baroque sources to describe sound is "sweet"
    - ☐ Suggests lightness and limited use of vibrato
- ☐ Volume represents the objective or technical aspects
  - ☐ Ideal Baroque sound was soft
  - ☐ Less ambient and white noise
  - ☐ Softer, gentler instruments (no grand piano, tuba, etc.), even Baroque trumpet
- ☐ Vibrato present, but limited in degree and frequency; as ornamentation and with narrower oscillation



- ☐ **Music for solo voice and instrumental accompaniment was favored as a dramatic contrast to Renaissance polyphony**
  - ☐ **Desired music that was simpler and more transparent**
  - ☐ **Solos in oratorios often by adult falsettists, boys, or castrati; some regions (Naples & other parts of Italy) used women**
  - ☐ **Desire for singers to express text clearly of utmost importance**
- ☐ **Baroque choral music (generally small choirs)**
  - ☐ **Mostly secular madrigals and sacred motets in early Baroque, cantatas and oratorio choruses in late**
  - ☐ **Secular madrigals performed by adult men and women, usually one per part**
  - ☐ **Secular stage choruses performed by soloists with minor roles**
  - ☐ **Liturgical works mainly performed by boys, men, and castrati**
  - ☐ **Soloists in operas and oratorios also generally sang choruses as well, often alternating in concertato style**
  - ☐ **Ripieno or tutti sections ideally had at least two on a part**
  - ☐ **Parts were exchanged and redistributed according to forces available (Vivaldi Gloria at oespedale)**
  - ☐ **Instrumentalists taught to imitate the human singing voice**



# Basso Continuo

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- ☐ Refers to the harmonic foundation and the melodic bass line
- ☐ Choice of instruments depended upon available resources, relative delicacy or grandeur of music, and music's character or sentiment of expression. Not necessarily genre or sacred/secular
  - ☐ Organ preferred for both sacred & secular in early Baroque and harpsichord more in favor during end of era. Lute and theorbo preferred in chamber
- ☐ Realizations in modern editions not by composer; Baroque realizations improvised and not limited to within the staff
- ☐ Choral pieces scored in a cappella texture like Bach's motets were performed with basso continuo, even into classical era



# Theorbo

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# Classical Sound

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- ☐ **Primary sources extolled virtues of subtlety, nuance, and elegance.**
  - ☐ **Praised singers who sang softly and instrumentalists who played like singers; unified instrumental and vocal sound**
  - ☐ **Lauded singers who could seamlessly meld falsetto with mid range of voice (falsetto extensively used)**
  - ☐ **Vibrato narrow in pitch fluctuation, and either limited to use as ornamentation or avoided**
  - ☐ **Avoided excessive loudness & abstain from producing coarse sounds**
- ☐ **Orchestras included larger number of strings, doubled winds and brass, almost always included a keyboard (organ & harpsichord in church), and chorus placed in front of orchestra with orchestra raised**
  - ☐ **consisted of strings, flutes, oboes, bassoons and 1-2 keyboards. Trombones often doubled voices; clarinet not standard until 19th c.**
  - ☐ **Average orchestra had 4-6 first and 4-6 second violins, 2-3 violas, 2-3 cellos, 2 basses and single players on winds. First and second violins generally placed across from each other (firsts to left of conductor and seconds to right)**
  - ☐ **Generally two orchestral players to every choral singer (Haydn conducted Creation in 1800 with 60 instruments & 24 singers)**
- ☐ **Women generally still excluded from singing in church (most church choirs between 8-32)**



# Meter & Tempo

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- ☐ Conductor usually the principal violinist or keyboardist
- ☐ Heartbeat considered basic musical pulse in early Baroque with variations indicated by Italian terms (from Renaissance)
  - ☐ Fluctuations common, especially slowing to cadence
- ☐ In Baroque, larger note values in meter signature insinuated slower tempo, especially in triple meter (3/2 slow, 3/4 medium, 3/8 fast)
  - ☐ Duple meters: common time = slow, alla breve (cut time) for faster tempo, and backwards C or 2 for very fast
- ☐ In classical, meter signatures with low-numbered denominators convey slow tempos and high numbers convey fast tempos. Quarter was standard unit so 4/4 & 2/4 indicate medium tempo. Small numerator indicates faster tempo
  - ☐ Low-numbered denominators generally for sacred music of somber, serious or weighty nature (except alla breve, which was used extensively and generally indicates twice as fast as common time)
  - ☐ Classical tempos were less varied and extreme than 19th c and today; associated & motivated by expressive characteristics
  - ☐ Classical era theorists paid considerable attention to minute gradations of tempo, to tempo fluctuation, and to tempo being motivated and colored by expressive properties



# Expressive Tempo Terms

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- ☐ **Terms in scores to indicate tempo gradation in Baroque music is rare. Performers interpreted tempo based on meter, character of music, rhythmic density, and harmonic motion**
  - ☐ **Allegro** - lively, brisk, animated, happy
  - ☐ **Andante** - indicates to perform rhythms as indicated and not altered as in *notes inégales*
  - ☐ *Vivace* - slightly slower than allegro in Baroque, but more "vivacious"
  - ☐ *Popular dance forms often had relatively distinct tempos*
  - ☐ *Variation of tempo within a movement was often desirable for expressive purposes*
  - ☐ *Recitative an outline of speech patterns but notation not to be adhered to strictly; accompaniment also meant to be free (telescoped final chord)*
- ☐ *Growing desire in classical era to specify tempo accurately (metronome invented by Maelzel in 1815)*
  - ☐ **Categories and terms similar to modern usage, just with closer together and less extreme**
  - ☐ **Rhythmic texture and harmonic density still determining factors; rubato and fluctuation still common**
  - ☐ **Meter in recitative aligned strong and weak syllables, but still flexible to represent speech patterns (telescoped final chord)**



# Articulation & Phrasing

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- ☐ Articulation in both eras tended toward soft and light attacks of individual notes to match focus on gentility and elegance
  - ☐ Messa di voce associated with each long note (keyboard continuo players would delay attack and release early to accommodate), even ties and dotted notes
  - ☐ Light attack necessary for virtuosic ornaments
  - ☐ Cantabile style of legato very different than 19th c legato
    - ☐ Notes on weak beats performed shorter than their printed notation, therefore not connected to following notes. Only notes on strong beats received full duration and therefore connected to following notes
    - ☐ Messa di voce effect created softness or slight break in sound between notes, more like a string of pearls connected to one another
    - ☐ "Silences of articulation" - performing dots of dotted rhythms as silences (French origin) dotted eighth/sixteenth or dotted quarter/eighth
- ☐ Phrasing beyond a few notes under a slur not a major topic in primary sources (focus on small units and how they relate rather than long phrases)
- ☐ Slurs in Classical era indicate no noticeable break between notes beneath, but usually with a decrescendo. Slurs are separated from one another
- ☐ Staccato articulations express extreme shortness or separation. Wedges weightier and therefore longer.



# Metric Accentuation & Rhythmic Alteration

- Notes were performed with varying degree of emphasis according to placement within measure, indicated by meter signature
  - Levels of emphasis depend upon importance of notes relative to each other (harmonic tension building)
  - Quantitas intrinseca - (intrinsic quantity or length) strong beats held for full value while weak beats are shorter, also double- or over-dotting
  - Baroque composers notated rhythm as merely a general outline or rough proportion of notes to one another
    - Notes inégales - two beamed eighth notes often played as dotted eighth and sixteenth or divided in triplet (first note 2/3 of quarter) depending upon text or expressive character
    - Also referred to practice of double- or over-dotting dotted rhythms
    - Triplet conformity - triplet vs. Dotted rhythms composed concurrently the dotted rhythm aligned with the last triplet early in Baroque. By Classical era they are not aligned
  - Classical era still accented meter via dynamics, only more slightly (de-emphasize weak beats rather than emphasize strong ones)
  - Rhythms still altered by convention: dots treated as silences to achieve clarity, over-dotting and triplet conformity still occurred but dotted notes beyond one metric beat not over-dotted (applies to rests)



# Ornamentation & Expression

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- ☐ Ornamentation expected in Baroque music, especially solos
  - ☐ Nationality played big role in amount of ornamentation. Addition of melodic passages (passaggi) common in Italy, single-note ornaments (trills & mordents) common in France, appoggiaturas & trills in England & Germany
  - ☐ Ornamentation limited early in Baroque (until 1620s-30s), common in mid-Baroque, and incorporated into compositions by late era so less room for improvisation.
  - ☐ Ornamentation limited in recitatives, orchestral music, and choral music/movements (except appoggiaturas, mordents and trills at cadences). Required and expected in solo pieces & movements.
    - ☐ Appoggiaturas most abundant except in France where trills & mordents were most popular; often indicated by small note written as eighth note, but not to be played as a grace note
  - ☐ Text painting very common in Baroque music to stir the "affects" and each mode had its own character
- ☐ Extemporaneous ornamentation still significant throughout entire Classical era, applied more discerningly and moderately
  - ☐ Appoggiaturas still most common, followed closely by trills (trills often start with an appoggiatura and were shorter)