

Baroque (1650-1750)

- Full of ornaments and decoration
- Use of antiphonal effects
- Use of terraced dynamics
- Often accompanied by a harpsichord
- The birth period of the modern orchestra

The word 'Baroque' was applied to architecture and was a way of describing the very decorated style of building that was becoming popular at this time. Buildings were being decorated with twisting, curling patterns and music too became highly decorated.

the music has lots of decoration. In some ways decorating the music like this meant that musicians were able to 'show-off' their skill. Singers too used to decorate the music in their singing.

The Baroque period was also a great time for musical development, not only in how music was played but in how music was composed, the development of instruments and new types of work

Related idea: ORNAMENTATION

The Harpsichord was a very important instrument - it had been around for many years but became increasingly used to accompany other instruments. Click on the picture to hear some harpsichord music. Notice how the tunes weave in and out - an idea brought from the Medieval period.

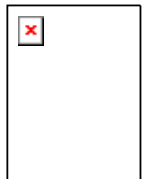


Related idea: COUNTERPOINT

The violin too was becoming increasingly popular as a solo instrument. Developed from the viols of the Renaissance the violin family were the 'back bone' of any musical ensemble. The Italian violin makers such as Antonio Stradivarius were developing and improving instruments. Composers began to write music specifically for the instruments.

One such composer was Vivaldi

who wrote many pieces of work for strings - his most famous is perhaps the 'Four Seasons' - this was important because it was amongst the first pieces of music that had a 'programme'. Click on his picture to hear the first movement of 'Spring'.



Related idea: CONTINUO; CONCERTO GROSSO; PROGRAMME MUSIC

Church music as in previous musical eras played a very important role but it was having less of an influence on general music making. That said many of the major composers in the Baroque period had worked in the church, including Vivaldi and J.S. Bach. Bach wrote a great deal of music and was responsible for the development of keyboard music. The Baroque period saw the firm establishment of Keys as we know them today. Bach's Toccata and Fugue in D Minor is perhaps one of the best known organ pieces.

There were several new musical forms that developed during the Baroque period - notably the **Opera** and the **Oratorio**. Opera was a staged music production, the early ones taking their themes from the old Greek legends. The main composer of opera at this time was **Claudio Monteverdi** but it was the next period - the Classical - where Opera developed. An Oratorio is a large work for soloists, choir and orchestra. It takes as its theme stories from the bible, such as the death of Christ (the Passion). Oratorios were usually sung in churches and large halls by the Baroque period they were a musical presentation only, not acted. The most famous Oratorio with words in English is **Handel's 'Messiah'** which tells of the birth of Christ - (the Nativity). Perhaps the most played section is the *Halleluiah Chorus* - when the 'Messiah' was performed in Covent Garden, London (23rd March, 1743) King George II stood up as the 'Halleluiah Chorus' began. It has now become traditional for concert goers to stand for this part of the 'Messiah'.



Related ideas: ARIA; RECITATIVE; CHORUS

One piece of Baroque music made famous by a television advert was Bach's 'Air on a G String'

