

Baroque Period

The Baroque period, spanning from 1580- 1750, was a time in which many styles were formulated. Influenced by changes in religious thinking and shifts in political attitudes, the baroque music is rich in contrasts and contradictions, and the artistic ideals to which one composer aspired would not necessarily be the same as another's ideals. However, there all were constant values shared by creative minds, and central to the thinking of a Baroque artist, whether it was a painter, sculptor or musician, was a declared intent to move the passions. The belief was that music represented the emotions, or affections, of life, and hence should excite the listener's emotions. This aim spread beyond Italy, the 'fountainhead of Baroque art in all its forms', to become one of the 'distinguishing features of artistic endeavor'¹ throughout the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.

During the renaissance, composers wrote polyphonically, that is, in equal independent voices. The Baroque placed emphasis on the treble and bass- the outermost strands of a texture. This was the heart of the new monodic style and with the polarity between treble and bass, where a typical Baroque piece consisted of a melodic line for a voice, a bass line for a continuo instrument playing the written line and a plucked or keyboard instrument playing the figured chords-mainly improvising- to fill the intervening space between the two poles, there came a stronger sense of tonality based on the importance of three principle chords (tonic, dominant, subdominant) as well as chromaticism and dissonance.

The development of instrumental music during the first half of the seventeenth century was a complex issue, with no tonal direction and inconsistencies of terminology and forms, which were anything but standardized.

Baroque composers and performers attached great importance to the thoroughbass, or basso continuo, which began as shorthand to indicate the harmony implied by the two outer voices. This soon became a constructive device; a way of achieving continuity while leaving the upper voice or voices free to express a text or soar in instrumental fantasies. In figured bass, the only instrumental part given under the voice is the base line. Over the notes of the base are numbers and signs, such as 11, 7 or $\overset{6}{4}$, which instruct the player to include in the chord above the bass, the 11th, 7th or 6th and 4th notes, with the bass note as 1. When there is no number over a bass note, the player builds a chord with the 3rd or 10th above the bass, major or minor whichever belongs to the key. Normally, the bass line was played by one or more bass instruments, while a keyboard instrument or one belonging to the lute or harp class or a combination of several of these, played the chords implied by the bass and its figures. Generally, the instruments that were capable of providing full harmonic support were used for basso continuo and these were reinforced by those capable of sustaining the bass line. This practice of "figuring" basses continued throughout the baroque period and beyond, although, whether figured or not, a bass that was meant to serve as the foundation for an

¹ A Guide to the Concerto- Edited by Robert Layton

improvised accompaniment was called a basso continuo or thoroughbass, due to the fact that it was continuously present, even when there were rests in the bass voices or instruments.

Summary of Baroque Characteristics²

- Basso continuo (two principal contours -melody and bass polarity- with the intervening space filled in by improvised harmony) - single unifying element in Baroque music. While the treble expresses the mood, the bass supports the melody
- Figured bass
- Unbroken lines with long phrases and well-spaced cadences
- Unchanging affekt
- Fast harmonic rhythm
- Series of first inversion chords, series of suspensions, seventh chords on any degree of the scale, Phrygian cadence, hemiola, circle-of-fifths, sequence, tierce de Picardie, lack of dynamic markings and performance directions, only rarely distant modulations (usually to one degree flat or sharp)
- Contrast /the pursuit of striking effect (stile concertante): like solo-tutti alternation of the concerto grosso
- Expressive use of dissonance (the dissonance treatment is a major stylistic difference between Renaissance and Baroque)
- Contrapuntal independence of voices and instrumental parts, a turn to chordal harmony from intervallic harmony
- Instrumental music dominating vocal music: new instrumental genres
- Improvisation (as in the realization of figured bass) and ornamentation (particularly in France)
- Interchange of idioms (especially between vocal and instruments; Vivaldi, JS Bach)
- Fully established tonality in late Baroque
- Homophony: In late Baroque music homophony was held in check by the fast-moving continuo. In the relation between melody and chord progression, the consideration of the latter began to weigh more heavily (a process finally led to the homophony of the Mannheim school). The continuo-homophony differs from the plain homophony of the Mannheim school in its fast harmonic rhythm, and its energetic and sweeping rhythmic patterns that prevailed in both melody and bass
- Variation: variation appears so consistently as an element of Baroque music that the whole era may justly be called one of variation

The Italian word “concertare” has two meanings. It means to struggle or fight; it also means to cooperate. Both these contrary meanings are present in a concerto, in which a group of solo instruments (concerti or

² <http://members.tripod.com/~dorakmt/music/baroque.html>

concertino), supported by a continuo group, is contrasted with an entire orchestra, known as concerto, ripieno, or tutti. Sometimes soloists and orchestra all play together, sometimes separately. Sometimes they play contrasting music, sometimes the same. This dramatic balance and contrast of opposing forces is the essence of the concerto.

The earliest instrumental concerto form emerged at least as early as the 1670s and was of Roman origin. One of the pioneers was Alessandro Stradella (1644-1682), who experimented with a contrasting, antiphonal scheme between small and large groups within the instrumental sections of his oratorios. E.g. San Giovanni Battista. The precise disposition of players in the concerto grosso is not possible to determine, but Stradella almost certainly wrote for violins, divided violas, cellos and a larger bass stringed instrument. The transition to the more modern ensemble of violins in two parts instead of divided violas dates from the late 1670s or early 1680s. Stradella's *sinfonie a più istromenti* has what are probably the earliest examples of string concertino contrasted with string concerto grosso in a purely instrumental context.

By the late Baroque period, the concerto form had become established. There are usually three movements, in the pattern of fast-slow-fast. The first movement is usually an Allegro, whilst the second movement usually has an expressive, slow melody that sounds like an opera aria. The third movement is a little faster and livelier than the first.

The first and third movements of a Baroque concerto are in ritornello form, which exploits the contrast between the solo instruments and the orchestra in a highly organized way. Ritornello is the Italian word for something that returns, and the ritornello in a concerto is an orchestral passage that constantly returns. Between appearances of the ritornello, the solo instrument plays passages of contrasting material, which are known as episodes.

At the beginning of a movement in ritornello form, the orchestra plays the entire ritornello in the tonic key. During the body of the movement, the ritornello often will appear only in partial form and will be in different keys, but at the end, the ritornello would return in its entirety in the tonic key.

Brandenburg Concerto No.2- First Movement (BWV 1047)

Duration	5:12 ³
Tempo	Allegro
Key Signature	F Major
Time Signature	2/2 cut common time.

³ Understanding Music- Jeremy Yudkin

Stylistic Features	Trills in the concerti
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Instruments:

<u>Concertino</u>	<u>Concerto Grosso</u>
Trumpet	First and Second Violins
Recorder	Viola
Oboe	Double Bass
Violin	Continuo

The first movement features three rhythmic motives, which combine to form the ritornello:

- a.
- b.
- c.

Structure:

- Bars 1-8. Ritornello in F Major (twice)
- Bars 9-12. Violin solo followed by a ritornello
- Bars 13-16. Duet between violin and oboe, followed by ritornello
- Bars 17-20. Duet between flute and oboe, followed by a part of the ritornello
- Bars 21-22. Duet between trumpet and flute
- Bars 29-30. Solo concerti, accompanied by continuo
- Bars 31-32. Trumpet trills over a part of the ritornello in D minor
- Bars 40-47. Dynamic changes between soft and very soft, followed by ritornello in B major
- Bars 50-55. Dynamic changes alternating between soft and loud
- Bars 60-67. Duet between flute and violin, joined by oboe and trumpet.
- Bars 68-69. Ritornello in C minor
- Bars 77-81. Sequence between trumpet and oboe, modulating through keys
- Bars 82-83. G minor, all instruments playing imitative parts.
- Bars 84-93. Section in G minor. Highly imitative
- Bars 94-102. Section in A minor, monetary shift to D minor. Basses and trumpet in close imitation
- Bars 103-106. Reiteration of first theme in unison. (F major)
- Bars 107-112. Final episode, counterpoint activity in trumpet and basses
- Bars 113-114. Return to original texture in C major.
- Bars 115-end. Return to F major. Last return of ritornello.

Four Seasons Winter- First Movement (Op.8 No.4, RV297)

