

With the evolution of man has come the inevitable evolution of the arts. Whether decorative, visual, or musical, the arts have seen several distinct periods of development through the course of history and as one of the definitive artistic media, music is no exception. During the 17th through middle 18th centuries, music progressed through a period that historians labeled “Baroque.” New musical forms and a style of music that was unheard of at the end of the renaissance characterized this period. These new styles and forms saw the emergence of several composers who, rather than break new ground in the musical world, took the existing forms and developed them into robust, mature works that fully exhibited their virtuosic command of the “rules” of composition.

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750) and George Frideric Handel (1685-1759) were two composers that historians and musicians alike use to describe the essence of the baroque period. Neither composer generated groundbreaking reforms in the core of the music they composed, but rather they took that which was defined and increased the breadth, scope, and complexity of existing genres to suit their purposes as working musicians and/or composers.

During the Baroque period, a popular musical form was the Prelude and Fugue (also called Toccata and Fugue or Fantasia and Fugue). Such a form was nothing new during the Baroque period, as examples of similar forms date back to renaissance and even pre-renaissance musical examples. The practice of freely improvising a few notes of the coming contrapuntal passage was common in those periods prior to Baroque. When composers such as Girolamo Frescobaldi (1583-1643) and Dieterich Buxtehude (1637-1707) codified the Prelude and Fugue into its then-modern form, the way was paved for Bach’s *Praeludium et Fuga in A Minor, BWV 543* (~1708-1717). The prelude

section consisted of contrasting irregular rhythms coupled with sets of asymmetric runs of driving sixteenth notes (Palisca 346). Such irregular compositions were used to emulate the improvisational nature of the prelude of days past. While the form was codified by the likes of Buxtehude and Frescobaldi, there are some fundamental differences between their works and those of J.S. Bach. Bach's *Praeludium et Fuga in A Minor* consists of separate sections for the prelude and fugue. A staple of Frescobaldi's work, *Tocatta No. 3* (1615 revised 1637) gives us the relentless movement associated with a prelude form, although its extensive use of cadence evasion is a contrast to Bach's mostly uniform movement from tonic to dominant and vice versa. The less-defined fugal section in Frescobaldi's work also serves as a contrast to Bach's later work, however, the roots of the template for his toccata are nonetheless prevalent in this example.

Buxtehude's *Praeludium in E Major, BuxWV 141*, followed a progression of several "free" segments with fugal segments intertwined within the whole of the piece. While the prelude and the fugue sections may not be as clearly defined as Bach's piece, they nonetheless serve as the template from which they will be written. Parallels can also be drawn to Arcangelo Corelli's (1653-1713) *Trio Sonata, Op. 3 No. 2* because the second movement, *Allegro*, makes use of fugal sections in the melodic structure. The voices of the fugue are spread out among the voices of the instruments involved. The evolution an artistic medium such as Prelude and Fugue to its mature form spanned the better part of the 17th century, and then took its place among the many popular forms of the Baroque Era.

The chorale prelude in the Baroque era is "a short piece in which the entire melody is presented just once in readily recognizable form" (Palisca 350). Both Bach

and Buxtehude wrote chorale preludes and each had an interesting take on how to arrange the chorale. In Bach's *Durch Adams Falls BWV 637* (~1717), Bach places the original melody in the topmost voice and makes extensive use of the lower voices and pedal to participate in large amounts of text painting. The passages marked with any kind of text related to a "fall" have intervallic drops that were considered dissonant at the time. The intervallic dissonances coupled with the easily recognizable melody in the topmost voice made for an effective setting of Lazarus Spengler's text. *Danket dem Herrn, BuxWV 181*, by Buxtehude, provides a contrast to Bach's style of text setting for a chorale prelude. Buxtehude sets the text for "Thank the Lord, for He is very kind" by taking the original melody and dividing it among the various voices and making the melodic phrase the subject of a short fugue. Each of the three verses would see an individualized segment of imitation followed by a run of freely composed counterpoint (Palisca 429). The two seem to share characteristics of the chorale prelude in name only, however, there is a connection between the two, for without Buxtehude's setting of his text, Bach could have never developed upon the idea of making the text more effective even though there would be no actual text in the organ chorale. The idea of making the meaning of the text more effective was characteristic of Bach's chorale prelude. Such a development from the counterpoint-centered chorale prelude of Buxtehude to the message-conveying text painted medium of Bach shows just how much variation there can be within a certain medium.

As one of the more massive works in J.S. Bach's repertoire, the cantata is a massive musical setting of a religious text delivered in multiple movements. Although not a dramatic medium, the cantata was organized religion's answer to the use of aria and

recitative. Cantata in the Baroque era made use of alternating aria and recitative sections to set a religious text to a specific story. J.S. Bach's *Wachet Auf, ruft uns die Stimme*, BWV 140, sets the story of Philip Nicolai's telling of angels come down from heaven to wake the virgins in anticipation of the bridegroom's arrival. The entire cantata makes distinctive use of ritornello reminiscent of Antonio Vivaldi's (1678-1741) *Concerto Grosso in G Minor, Op. 3, No. 2, RV 578*. The ritornello is divided into four-bar phrases that are based on several distinct melodic motives (Palisca 547). Bach also makes extensive use of text painting and subtle musical paintings that are clearly throwbacks to composers such as Josquin Des Prez (~1450-1521) and Carlo Gesualdo (~1561-1613) that wrote in the "musica reservata" style in the renaissance and ars nova periods.

J.S. Bach lived and worked in Germany all of his life. His work was, almost exclusively, with the Lutheran church, which is not surprising since it is known that Bach was a devout Lutheran. Such information may seem peripheral to his works as a musician but it becomes integral when trying to take a historical analysis of J.S. Bach's *Mass in B Minor, BWV 232 (~1749)*. It is somewhat of a historical idiosyncrasy that Bach, a self-professed devout Lutheran, to write a Catholic mass, but historians have inferred that the mass was probably written as a gift for the King of Poland. The historical oddity aside, Bach's *Mass in B Minor*, is one of the most well-known and oft-performed examples of his work. His setting of the credo includes a single tenor being accompanied by a small chamber group of instrumentalists. Such an instrumentation differs with Credo's of the past, especially that of Giovanni Da Palestrina (1525/6-1594). Palestrina's *Pope Marcellus Mass* (1567) sets the credo, in a style typical of the period, for unaccompanied voices set in contrapuntal melodies. Such a fundamental difference

in the setting of a mass would indicate the differences in philosophies regarding the setting of text between the two periods. Bach's post-reformation world held a belief that, with matters regarding religion, the meaning of the text should come first and thus should not take second place to musicianship or rules of counterpoint. For those who wrote "traditional" catholic masses, such as Palestrina and Josquin Dez Prez the meaning of the text took a backseat to the melodic structures of the pieces at hand. Although Josquin's *Missa Pange lingua* (~1510) presents a homo-rhythmic setting of the credo, the rest of the mass is a contrapuntal mess of voices taking complex imitative passages of each other. Bach's setting of "Et exspecto resurrectionem" is a reflection of a Baroque trend of large-scale instrumental accompaniment to a choral text setting. Here, a full orchestra accompanies five voices. The text is displayed in blocks alternating to and from a ritornello from the orchestral accompaniment. While Bach's works throughout the Baroque era are vital to the understanding of music during that period, where it came from and where it was headed, Bach's work contributed no less to the development of music than G.F. Handel.

Bach is probably best known for his work as a German in Germany, Handel, however, is perhaps best known for his work as a German in England. During a brief period in the early 18th century, Handel was patron to the elector of Hanover, and although this appointment would not last, it would prove to be a defining point in Handel's career. In 1712, he was granted permission to take a trip to London, and what started out as a short leave of absence turned into a 2-year stay in England's capitol. Ironically, George I, Handel's master in Hanover, ascended the British throne shortly thereafter, becoming King George I of England. This two year period in London would

only be the tip of the iceberg of what would be considered a long and prosperous career for Handel.

If Bach were to be defined by his eclectic collection of religious works, then the defining works of Handel would be his adherence to the operatic tradition. Handel wrote many operas like *Giulio Cesare* (1724) that emphasized the dramatic tradition of the opera. *Giulio Cesare* is the story of Julius Caesar and subsequent trip to Egypt and all the drama that occurs therein. Handel skillfully uses the orchestra as an accompanying force during the recitative and aria, but also knew how to take advantage of a full orchestra by writing passages in which there were powerful unison passages and utter silence when appropriate. Like Alessandro Scarlatti's (1660-1725) opera *La Griselda*, Handel uses a repeat to return to the phrases at the beginning at the end of use, thus making effective use of "Da Capo" or "Dal Segno" form. The setting of the text is done effectively to create both musical and dramatic beauty by using well-placed sets of delays and avoided cadences.

Fierce competition with a rival operatic company coupled with the tightening of the moral collar by the church forced Handel to adopt an alternative to opera as his main artistic medium. The church ruled that during solemn periods in the liturgical year the theatres in England would be closed, and as such, no operas, or any other dramatic works for that matter, could be performed. As such, Handel took a foray into the form of the Oratorio, an adaptation of the operatic tradition for the purpose of telling religious stories. His Oratorio, *Saul* (1739), was, for all intents and purposes, an opera set to the story of Saul's conversion into Christianity. Although Oratorios make extended use of accepted operatic forms, aria, recitative, etc., no physical drama takes place in the setting of the

stories. Handel makes use of contrapuntal passages and fugue, typical baroque compositional elements, to tell his story of Saul, while Heinrich Schütz (1585-1672) used more of a concerto grosso form to tell of Saul's revelation. Schütz set the story of Saul for six voices and orchestra and made extended use of harmonic dissonance rather than play with rhythms or melodic structures to tell the story. The relatively thick-textured nature of Schütz's setting makes for a dramatic interpretation of Christ's words to Saul. Handel, however, takes his experience with recitative and aria to paint a no-less striking story of Saul.

The "masters" of any historically defined era or period are usually those that came into the scene "en medias rex" (in the middle of things). We see that both J.S. Bach and G.F. Handel took the existing artistic forms and artistic media available to them codified at the beginning of their period and expanded them into what would become the defining elements of music of the Baroque period. Like Josquin Des Prez during the height of the Ars Nova and Adrian Willaert during the peak of the madrigalists, composers at the middle of their respective periods were responsible for creating the defining characteristics and notable references to that period before the inevitable move towards evolution and change take hold and move the music or art away from its previous center. The process of musical evolution is, perhaps, not as notable as some of the social or political watermarks, but provides much needed insight into the minds and hearts of those who lived during such fascinating times.

Works Cited

Grout, Donald Jay & Claude V. Palisca. A History of Western Music. 6th ed. W.W. Norton & Company, Inc: New York. 2001

Palisca, Claude V. Norton Anthology of Western Music, Vol 1: Ancient to Baroque. 4th ed. W.W. Norton & Company, Inc: New York. 2001