

Compare
brandenburg
concerto 4 (first
movement – essay



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The two music pieces chosen for this exercise are JS Bach's Brandenburg Concerto 4 (First Movement - Allegro) and Joseph Haydn's London Symphony (No. 104 First Movement). These two pieces were chosen on account of the sharp differences between them in terms of style, texture, genre, period, etc. For example, Bach's piece is written for a chamber orchestra of not more than 17 players. This was roughly the common size for the Baroque concerto format. Haydn's piece, on the other hand was written to be performed by a much larger symphony orchestra comprising around 40 musicians. It is perhaps due to the limited resources at Bach's disposal that constant invention in music was a matter of necessity than of will. In contrast, the bolder, simpler style of Haydn is typical of the Classical era. The following observation by Igor Stravinsky's in his 1947 work *Poetics of Music* (1947) applies to both the works in question:

" All music, whether it submits to the normal flow of time or whether it disassociates itself there from, establishes a particular relationship, a sort of counterpoint between the passing of time, the music's own duration, and the material and technical means through which the music is made manifest" (p. 32)

The most obvious difference between the two pieces is their musical style. JS Bach's music is synonymous with the Baroque style, with a high contrapuntal texture. The parallel melody lines are tightly and finely woven in Bach's music. This is evident in the first allegro of Brandenburg Concerto 4. The Brandenburg Concertos contain an assortment of pieces with varying styles. Some were courtly dances like the first concerto, whereas some others invoke a poignant romance like the sixth concerto. Concerto 4 is full of

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zestfulness and vivacity, particularly the Allegro. It contains many of typical features of Bach's music, namely, precisely constructed harmonies, harmonic progression, polyphony and intricate part writing. The six concertos as a whole were conceived as experimentation in form.

Conventionally the concerto forms identified a solo lead instrument and the other instruments were assigned the status of accompaniments. Such an arrangement is mostly evident in the works of two eminent contemporaries of Bach - George Frideric Handel and Antonio Vivaldi. But unlike Handel or Vivaldi, the musical texture of Bach is such that the distinction between 'main' and 'accompanying' instruments is constantly challenged. (Kanny 2013) This is deduced from the fact that each melody line can exist on its own accord - they stand as perfectly whole compositions. When two such melodies were brought to harmony the music takes on an altogether new dimension. To express in common parlance the sum is much greater than the parts. The greatness of Bach lies in the fact that the parts are themselves complete and rich. This is very much the case in the Allegro of Brandenburg Concerto 4. Here, the flute and two Oboes work in counterpoint to the other, producing a rich and finely knit texture. The other feature of the Allegro in Brandenburg Concerto 4 is its beautifully crafted alternations of tempo.

Joseph Haydn is the father of the Symphony. He popularized this form and made it his own. His more than 100 Symphonies composed over his lifetime stand testimony to this fact. The piece being perused for this comparative analysis is the first movement of his London Symphony (No. 104). The instruments for which it is scored include two flutes, two clarinets in A, two

bassoons, two horns in D and G. There are also two trumpets in D to go along with timpani and strings. The introduction begins with strings at a slow yet grandiose fashion, alternating between solemn and triumphant moods. Then the only theme of the movement is introduced. The strings play the dominant role in the theme, which is later transposed in A Major to the woodwinds. This is followed by a codetta. Later the theme is developed again with variation. The theme which was first expressed in D major is developed in B minor the second time around before reverting to D major during the recapitulation. Haydn was a composer who drew from dominant cultural streams of the day. Researchers have identified the theme in the first movement with the popular English hymn-tune (ex. 4). First published in 1790, it is one “ of the most successful English church music publications of the time: *The Psalms of David for the use of Parish Churches*, ‘ music selected, adapted and composed by Edward Miller Mus. Doct’. 6 (Kee, 2006) The London Symphony as a whole is considered one of best compositions by Joseph Haydn. On the day following its premiere, the *Morning Chronicle* made this observation about the technique involved in the first movement: “ Until now the generally-held assumption has been that the first three movements are quotation-free. Indeed the well-known main theme of the first movement is often described as a ‘ singing allegro’ devoid of other connotations.” (Kee, 2006).

There are marked differences between the work by Bach and the one by Haydn. The monothematic composition of Haydn is quite common during the Classical era of which he was an integral part. In contrast, all the unique characteristics of the Baroque aesthetic were captured in Bach’s work.

Further, Bach's own unique innovations were introduced through the skilful presentation of diatonal harmony and bold choice of solo instruments (ex. Recorders). With regard to Bach's piece in particular, a training in appreciating counterpoint is vital for appreciating the music. The Symphonies of Haydn stand in relief to the aesthetics of Bach, in that, counterpoint is only minimally employed. This gives simplicity and accessibility to the music at the cost of compromising on complexity and depth. Although a degree of objectivity could be brought to the evaluation of the two pieces, the manner of 'listening' is a factor too. As Ola Stockfelt notes in the work 'Adequate Modes of Listening' (1977):

" Analysis of music in everyday listening situations must be based on listening adequate to the given situation. Such adequacy is not determined by the music style in and of itself, or by the genre within which the music style was created, or by the genre to which it primarily belongs today, but rather by the location of the music in the specific situation" (p. 92)