

The thirty years' war and its effect on sacred baroque music



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The Thirty Years' War had a major impact in music, with the most affected genre being sacred music. The largest examples of this impact comes from different areas of Germany, such as the cities of Leipzig, Dresden, and Habsburg. Some of the composers that were affected include Heinrich Scheidemann, Heinrich Schütz, and Thomas Selle. There were many other composers that were affected, but these composers were able to find a way to express the effects the war had caused on not just them, but the environment in which they lived, through their music.

The Thirty Years' War occurred in Germany from 1618 to 1648. The primary reason for the occurrence of the war was due to an increasing issue between political and religious powers. However, as the war evolved, the reasons transitioned from religion and focused more on who would ultimately be given the responsibility of governing Europe.¹ Many German citizens believed that their government was ill-organized; many found it difficult to find honesty in what the government was saying. Citizens also did not feel that the government was loyal or efficient. The battle for political control predominantly occurred between the Counter-Reformation Catholics, the Lutheran Moderates, and the Calvinists.

The Thirty Years' War began as a local religious conflict between the Catholic Holy Roman Emperor and his Protestant subjects in Bohemia, but continued to grow into a continent-wide political conflict over the balance of power in Europe. The Thirty Years' War was divided into four phases: Bohemian, Danish, Swedish, and French. As each phase continues, the reason for fighting moved farther from local, religious conflicts, and more towards continental, political power.

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The first phase of the war began when the Protestants revolted against the Hapsburg Emperor, Ferdinand II. The future Holy Roman Emperor attempted to introduce Roman Catholic

absolutism in the Empire, causing Protestant nobles from both Bohemia and Austria to rebel. The Protestant Bohemians elected the Calvinist Frederick V as their new king of Bohemia. The southern states, which were mainly Roman Catholic, were angered by this, causing them to come together to form the Catholic League. The Catholic League expelled Frederick from the kingdom, with the support of the future Emperor, Ferdinand II. After fighting for five years, the future Roman Emperor Ferdinand II was victorious against the Protestants.

The climax of the Thirty Years' War occurred in 1618, which is known as the Defenestration of Prague.² On May 23, 1618, four Catholic Lords Regent assembled in the Bohemian Chancellory to discuss and clarify whether the four regents present were to blame for persuading the Emperor to order the building of Protestant churches on royal lands. After deliberating, Count Vilem Slavata of Chlum and Count Jaroslav Borzita of Martinice accepted responsibility for writing the letters to the Emperor and welcomed the punishment the Protestants had planned. This Defenestration of Prague was actually the second occurrence, with the first being in 1419. Immediately following the defenestration, the Protestant and Catholics began gathering allies for the war. Ferdinand II was finally elected Holy Roman Emperor in 1619, after the death of Matthias.

The second phase of the Thirty Years' War began when it was discovered that King Christian IV, the Lutheran ruler of Denmark, supported the Protestants in 1625, going against Ferdinand II. This phase of the war lasted from 1625 to 1629. King Christian was also the duke of Holstein and a prince of the Holy Roman Empire, which led to the controversial topic of why he would go against the Holy Roman Emperor. As a group of rebels came together, they decided to take control of Prague and declared Ferdinand II overthrown, allowing them to elect a new king, Frederick V. The Treaty of Lubeck of 1629 restored Holstein back to King Christian IV, but the Danish king declared that he would no longer intervene in German affairs. The Danish period ended the same as the Bohemian period, with a Hapsburg and Catholic victory.

The third phase, the Swedish period, began as the Catholic victories started to alarm Protestants everywhere.³ The victories of the Roman emperor endangered the independence of the German princes. The French Bourbons, however, were concerned with the growth of Hapsburg power. King Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden became the new Protestant leader in 1611. Under King Gustavus' rule, the Swedes moved into Germany and signed an alliance with France, to enter the war against the Hapsburgs. During the early stages of this conflict, the Swedes were successful and were able to win several notable victories. Roman Emperor Ferdinand II called on Wallenstein to form a new army for the battle of Lutzen. During the Battle of Lutzen, in November 1632, the Swedes were successful in defeating Wallenstein, but King Gustavus Adolphus was killed in fighting. Wallenstein was later

assassinated as he was entering secret negotiations with Sweden and France, leading to the end of the Swedish period.

The final phase of the Thirty Years' War was the French period, beginning with Cardinal Richelieu wanting to weaken the powers of the Hapsburgs and take the province of Alsace from the Holy Roman Empire. Cardinal Richelieu also plotted against Spain and its Hapsburg king, Philip IV. The fortunes of the war continued to move from helping the Holy Roman Empire and moved more in favor of the emperor's enemies. Emperor Ferdinand II died in 1637. Peace negotiation began in 1641, with little progress until the death of Richelieu in 1642.

In 1647, the Hapsburg forces, being led by Octavio Piccolomini, were successful at repelling the Swedes and the French from what is now known as Austria. During the Battle of

Prague, which was the last significant fight of the Thirty Years' War, the Swedes captured the Prague Castle from the Holy Roman Empire, but were unable to take the remainder of the city. During this time, Hapsburg was only able to keep control over the Austrian territories. Over seven-hundred people lost their lives, and over one-thousand were injured.

The Thirty Years' War finally ended with the signing of the Treaty of Westphalia, in 1648. The treaty established a new system of international relations that was based on the fundamental principle of the state's sovereignty.⁴ The treaty was signed twice, in two different places; first place being Munster and later at Osnabruck. The people involved chose to sign the

treaty in two different places as each side wanted to meet in a city that was under their own control, with one being a Roman Catholic city and one Protestant city. This treaty ended a disastrous period that caused the death of approximately eight million people. The end of the Thirty Years' War, however, left Hapsburg, Spain, isolated. Although the Thirty Years' War had come to an end, the war between France and Spain lasted until 1659, with the Treaty of Pyrenees ending the battle. Together, the Peace of Westphalia and the Treaty of the Pyrenees declared that France was the predominant power in the European continent.

Ultimately, historians believe that the Peace of Westphalia laid the groundwork for the formation of today's modern nation-state, which established fixed boundaries for the countries involved in the fighting. This radically altered the balance of power in Europe and helped reduce influence over political affairs for the Catholic Church, and also other religious groups. The Thirty Years' War fostered a fear among other communities across Europe and caused an increase in distrust among different religious faiths and ethnicities.

The effects of the Thirty Years' War differed between cities. Many cities had to be

careful deciding which side they would follow, as most cities had one of the other two groups surrounding them. The Protestant southern German lands were surrounded by the Catholics and faced pressure deciding which group to agree with. Being surrounded caused the Protestants to reject the Calvinistic ways and agree with the Catholics, in order to appease the

Catholics in Italy. However, most northern lands continued to follow Lutheranism.

Many refer to Baroque as an era, but unlike most historical terms, there have been many definitions into what Baroque is.⁵ Baroque music was once seen as a derogatory term, especially with the eighteenth-century commentators. The word Baroque is used for anything referring to or considered as grotesque, bizarre, excessive, or preposterous. During this time, many would see that being labeled "Baroque" would not be a compliment. The performance and preservation of early German Baroque music was diminished by the war, but the social affects helped the growth in sacred music compositions. The war also produced a drive in Europe towards elaborate music, produced primarily by German composers of the late Baroque Era.

There were many composers affected by the Thirty Years' War, such as Heinrich Scheidemann and Thomas Selle. Heinrich Schütz was the major composer of this time period and helped to allow the growth of sacred music. These composers were able find a way to incorporate not only what happened to them, but also what happened in their community, and transform the stories into different pieces of music. The availability of resources also depended on which city they resided in, as many cities did not find musicians a necessity.

Music in the seventeenth-century began as being under control by the reigning royal and nobility classes. Any religious or political statement that

composers wanted to make first had to be approved or granted permission by the composer's patron or lord. Higher levels of education

allowed more access for the enjoyment of music, though it was still limited to the aristocracy. Music was also used as propaganda between Catholicism and Lutheranism, during the Thirty Years' War. While both religions saw music as divine, the way that the music was composed for both services was clearly divided. Those that studied Catholicism continued to believe that music should be written in Latin, while Lutherans preferred music in their own language, in order to make sure that the words were understandable, which allowed the music to bring people closer to God.

Lutheran church music was mostly found in strophic form, easily rhymes, and used simple vernacular language. Melodies in Lutheran church music was often set to several texts; the focus being to divert the attention of the faithful away from ritualized ceremonies and more towards following inspiration. Jean Calvin, an early follower of Martin Luther, took Luther's teachings to a new level as a religious leader of the Swiss town of Geneva. Calvin attempted to eliminate all aspects of music that did not conform to anything else except for monophonic plainchant that was translated into the local language.

Outside of the church, many musical groups did not include singers. The instrumental, mostly winds, bands were called " Stadtpfeifern" and would usually consist of five to ten musicians that would play dance pieces outside of Italian musical influences. During the last years of the seventeenth century, instrumental music experienced a consolidation of style, which

allowed for composers to create a specific state of emotions without having to use text. Most instrumental pieces were performed in the streets and plazas, which was where most public events would take place. Music composed for outdoor festivals could also be used for sacred church purposes and sometimes even at the king's royal court.

Music theory also became more prominent in Germany. During the seventeenth century,

three styles of compositions were used; the *stylus gravis*, the *stylus luxurians*, and the *stylus luxurians theatralis*. Most music theory books from the seventeenth century were still using the church modes as their primary keys, though several German theorists began to classify the modes as being either *naturalior* or *mollior*, corresponding to today's major and minor.

German theorist Andreas Werckmeister proposed in getting rid of the church modes entirely and to replace them with only two modes; natural and less perfect modes. ⁶ Werkmeister theorized that all twelve transpositions could be used, and that their key signatures needed to be placed at the beginning of the piece, as opposed to having them every time a note would required a flat, sharp, or natural. This theory of remodeling the modes into major and minor keys created a modern system of music theory that is use today.

The employment of musicians varied between cities. In most German cities, musicians had two career options that they could choose; they could either serve in a court, as an employee of ruling noblemen, or could serve in a town or city as an employee to either the town council or the church. At the beginning of the war, German cities and courts tried to support the

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production of music financially; however, as the war continued it became more difficult to maintain steady support, especially in the south.

Throughout the beginning of the seventeenth century, the city of Leipzig was responsible for producing about a tenth of all printed music, in German-speaking lands.⁷ Although Leipzig was a small city, with only fifteen-thousand citizens, it was known as a center for both trade and learning, during the Thirty Years' War. The city would also host three trade fairs each year.

Leipzig was also known for its enjoyment in rich musical life, including its local musicians Schein and Johann Rosenmuller, whom had strong ties to the musicians at Dresden, such as Heinrich Schütz. Between the years of 1590 and 1660, a total of forty printers were known to have worked in Leipzig, and music was being published by twenty-three firms. Towards the end of the Thirty Years' War, Leipzig was attacked on four occasions and suffered two different outbreaks of the plague, yet its music printing was still preserved.

The music that was being printed in Leipzig could be split into four different categories: partbook collections, hymnals, treatises, and occasional pamphlets. Partbook collections were books that would be printed for each performing part. Partbooks were used for polyphony and were the specialist format for music. Hymnbooks consisted of the most widespread category of music and was one of the biggest categories of music, during this time.

Some hymnbooks would include hymnals that would be used during the liturgical year, while others were for domestic use only.⁸ Treatises were books that were primers in the rudiments of signing and notation. The

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occasional pamphlets were used in different events, such as weddings, funerals, or academic ceremonies. Over two hundred pamphlets survived from Leipzig, from the years of 1590 to 1660.

Heinrich Scheidemann was a German organist and composer. Scheidemann made significant contributions to sacred Baroque music.⁹ Scheidemann had the opportunity to study under Sweelinck in Amsterdam from the years of 1611 to 1614. It is evident that Sweelinck saw Scheidemann as one of his favorite pupils, as he dedicated a canon to him, prior to Scheidemann returning to Germany. Scheidemann was most well-known for his aid in the spread of chorale music in German lands; he was also known for using a wider range of instruments in his music, such as bassoons, violins, lute, and recorders. Scheidemann supplemented many choral compositions with organ accompaniment, and also had the honor of serving as the organist of the Catharinekirche in Hamburg, Germany. Many of his surviving examples are arrangements of organ pieces that followed a compositional process known as "intabulation". All of Scheidemann's sacred chorale music either used vernacular or biblical translations that were still able to avoid contradictions with either religion.

Scheidemann's biggest contribution to organ literature, was his settings of Lutheran Chorales, which occurred in one of three types; cantus firmus chorale arrangements, "monodic" chorale arrangements, or elaborate chorale fantasias. In addition to Scheidemann's chorale arrangements, he also wrote arrangements of the Magnificat. Unlike most composers, many of Scheidemann's pieces included text that would be approved by both the

Catholics and the Lutherans. Most composers found it difficult to get more than one group to approve their music, as they did not follow Scheidemann's religious indifferences.

Heinrich Scheidemann's music was never seen as widely disseminated. Like most northern German composers, he never published keyboard music, which caused his keyboard music to circulate only within professional circles and stayed within the Northern German region. Although the keyboard music was secluded to this region, the transmission of Scheidemann's pieces was remarkably rich and diverse, and led to somewhat knowing the date in which each piece was written. It is unknown exactly what Heinrich Scheidemann was doing during his last years of his life, but it is known that he passed away during a major epidemic of the plague in Hamburg in 1663.

Heinrich Schütz was a major Lutheran composer and organist, generally known as one of the most important composers before J. S. Bach, and is even considered one of the most important composers of the 17th century. Heinrich Schütz's talent was discovered by Moritz von Hessen-Kassel in 1599. Like many composers of this time period, Schütz's earliest job in music was being an organist. Schütz continuous tie to the church and Lutheranism were extremely important to his like as a composer, with the majority of his pieces being related back to his sacred ties.

Schütz's best known pieces are in the first of sacred music, including solo voice, with instrumental accompaniment, and a cappella choral music.

Schütz wrote a series of psalm setting that took antiphonal ideas and broadened them. These setting also included and intentional use of recitative

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music that made the text perfectly clear, which had not yet been seen in Germany. Additionally, Schütz was well-known for his use in rigorously antiphonal sounds and a vitally contrapuntal design. Heinrich Schütz is also known for his contributions in creating the first German Opera, *Dafne*.

¹⁰ One of the most interesting events that occurred to Schütz was that he was given the opportunity to study under Giovanni Gabrieli until 1613. Schütz wrote Italian madrigals and maintained the Italian fluence in his sacred compositions. Schütz also had the opportunity to study under Monteverdi. Schütz took what he learned from Monteverdi and began to incorporate basso continuo and monody into his compositional style. There is a common legend that says that Monteverdi gave his ring to Schütz, when Monteverdi was on his death bed. Although Schütz was given the chance to study under both Gabrieli and Monteverdi, he usually refers to Gabrieli as being his primary teacher.

Heinrich Schütz lived in a city that was severely devastated by the Thirty Years' War. Member of the church ensemble began to drop one by one as the war continued. In a seven-year period the number of members dropped by twenty-nine people. Despite these economical conditions, the Lutheran court maintained its musical foundations and music continued to be written.

Heinrich Schütz was one of the last composers to write in modal style, using non-functional harmonies that often resulted from the inner-harmony of voices. Schütz's music extensively uses imitation, in which entries would often come in at an irregular order and at varied intervals. Above all, Schütz music displayed an extreme sensitivity to the accents and meaning of the

texts, which would usually be drawn from *musica poetica*. Schütz's music included the use of imitation, but was structured in a way that the successive voices did not necessarily enter after the same number of beats or at predictable interval differences. After many years of writing excellent music, Schütz finally died from a stroke at the age of eighty-seven, in 1672. Even during the last few days of his life, Schütz continued to travel and compose.

Although Heinrich Schütz did not write works for organ, the seventeenth-century became the golden age of the organ in Germany. Compositions for organ became extremely popular in northern German cities because they did not face as much preoccupation with the war as southern cities. The use of organ originated in sacred music. Though it was used in Catholic churches, many saw its primary use in the northern German lands in the traditional Lutheran liturgy.

Many wonder how all of the compositions of sacred music were preserved during and after the end of the Thirty Years' War. The main location responsible for a large portion of the works that still exist today is the central city of Leipzig. During the War, Leipzig was the primary city for trade and learning. Due to the city's location, it became the trade way to the expanding markets of Bohemia, Pomerania, Prussia, and Silesia.

Although Dresden was affected very hard by the Thirty Years' War, many northern cities, including Hamburg and Lübeck, members of the Hanseatic League, were unaffected. Hamburg serves as a musical metropolis and allowed the flourishing of instrumental and organ music. Hamburg created a position known as the Kantor, whose responsibilities were to organize and

direct music in the services of the four parish churches. The Kantor was also able to teach school choirs, who would go and perform at those churches. Trumpet music also played a huge role in Hamburg. The court would employ trumpeters for either two reasons; they performed in the church when needed or would perform for weddings and on certain occasions to alert the community in case of a fire or any other public emergency. The trumpeters are known for contributing to the social prominence of music in society.

Thomas Selle was born in Zörbig, but began his studies in Leipzig in 1622. It is not known for sure who Thomas Selle studied under, but Selle was possibly a pupil of either Sethus Calvisius and Johann Hermann Schein at the Thomasschule and at the University of Leipzig. Selle also held teaching positions before becoming a Kantor. In 1634, Thomas Selle finally became Kantor at Itzehoe, later moving to Johanneum, Hamburg in 1637. Selle composed nearly 300 motets, which were either old-fashioned and polyphonic, used poly-choral techniques, or were moving towards the concertato style. Thomas Selle also wrote many secular songs that showed the transition from polyphonic to monodic style.

Thomas Selle was one of the major composers in Hamburg. As the population increased, as well as the support from the courts and city council, Selle was able to grow the music programs in Hamburg. At the beginning of the war, only twenty-four performances were heard per year, but as Selle continued to grow the program, there were now performances at least three times a week. Hamburg was also important for its involvement in the making of the Passion. Selle's Passion of 1643 was the first Passion to include instrumental interludes, which would later become important to the maturity of the genre.

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Thomas Selle was also given the opportunity to be appointed as a vice-directory of the Royal Chapel, by Louis XIV.

Thomas Selle is known for his contributions to the German Passion tradition, involving his use of *intermedia*, poly-choral motets that dispersed within the Passion story to summarize the narrative. Intermedias were the first non-gospel texts that were included in parts of the Passion tradition; however, Selle allowed others to remove the intermedia in order to accommodate churches that were more conservative.

The Thirty Years' War contributed significantly to the integration of foreign influences in German music. The war provided a diverse culture for musicians to use. In the wealthier northern cities, sacred music became very important and helped with the employment of organists. The southern areas helped prepare German lands for their opportunity to rise in heights of European Baroque music. The central German lands were responsible for the publication and distribution of music. The social effects of the Thirty Years' War may have limited the growth of performers and preservation of music, but it created an atmosphere for the growth of elaborate music from the composers of the late Baroque era. The social effects of the war created a social environment in Europe that allowed the enhancement of sacred music compositions.

The Thirty Years' War had a major impact throughout Europe, with the greatest problems coming from different areas of Germany. Due to political and religious differences, many

composers did not have the ability to compose pieces how they wanted to. During the time of the war, many changes in sacred music occurred, as well as trading becoming very important. Heinrich Scheidemann, Heinrich Schütz, and Thomas Selle were able to overcome the obstacles that the war had caused, and maintained a successful career in music. These composers did not let the view of musicians, during the time of the war, affect their goals as musicians and continued to produce pieces of music that are still seen today.

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