

Characteristics of the renaissance and baroque periods



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Music is a form of expression that has changed over time with the discovery and formation of different techniques and characteristics across the eras.

The Renaissance and the Baroque periods have many similarities, but also many differences that make them unique. Contrasting the characteristics of the Renaissance and Baroque periods, reveals how history repeats itself while advancing in specific areas.

History played a role in how Renaissance music was composed and performed. The Renaissance era spanned the years 1450 to 1600. This period is known for the rebirth of human creativity, with “rebirth being the literal definition of renaissance” (Ongaro 1). It was a time of exploration and adventure with the voyage of Christopher Columbus and scientific advancements. It was also an age of curiosity and individualism, with humanism becoming a huge intellectual movement. These changes played a major role in the variations of musical works and techniques in this era. While history changed the sound the Renaissance, printing widened the circulation of its music across the nations. While sacred music was still a major player in the music world (with typically male church choirs growing) secular music became more prominent and widely accepted. Musicians not only worked in the churches, but also in courts and towns. This shift of musical activity allowed town musicians to play civic proceedings such as weddings, this is important because secular music was not acceptable in the middle ages. During the middle ages musicians typically played for aristocrats instead of public events. With the rise of secular music, Vienna, Austria became the leading music capital of the world.

While the Renaissance was known for the rebirth of human creativity, the Baroque period was known for its distinctive chaos and change in musical styles. The Baroque period spanned the years 1600 to 1750. The word baroque is of Portuguese origin with an original meaning of “irregularly shaped pearl” (Buelow 1). The term was popularized in the English language as “meaning variously strange, distorted, extravagant and so on.” (Buelow 1). The changes in technique of musical works can be tied into the events of this time. Specifically, the Reformation which began in the year 1517 ending in 1648. Martin Luther was a major figure during the protestant Reformation, he was said to believe that “music was the greatest gift of God after religion itself” (Butt 2017). Luther had a major impact on the sacred music of this period that was sung in churches. He practiced the “glorious polyphony of catholic practice”, however he incorporated chorales that could be sung by an entire congregation (Butt 2017). Heinrich Schütz composed 3 sacred concertos (polyphonic concertos sometimes with instrumentation sometimes without) that became some of his most well-known vocal sacred pieces (Britannica 2018). While sacred music was preserved and advanced in the Baroque period secular music advanced as well. Music during this period typically had a continuous mood throughout a movement. The basso continuo became the go to bass line of musical works and church modes were replaced by major and minor keys. During the baroque era different forms were used more often such as operas, sonatas, suites, fugues and concertos. Ternary dynamics were prominent as well.

The Renaissance and Baroque periods can be distinguished from one another by their distinctive sound. The texture of the Renaissance period was

majority polyphonic. During the Renaissance secular music became more widely accepted in society. Among the important genres of secular music was the Italian Madrigal. The Italian Madrigal was written using lyrical poetry. Madrigal composers set texts that aspired to be, of high literary quality, instead of simple strophic poems (Ongaro 81). Lyrical poetry featured word painting, this occurs when the sound of a lyric purposely describes its literal meaning, these features gave secular pieces multiple emotions. While secular music was on the rise, the Mass and Motet became the most significant arts of sacred music. A Mass is described as “ the central liturgical celebration of the catholic church.” (Ongaro 69). A Mass is composed of some unchanging parts these remaining parts are known as the ordinary of the mass. This specific musical work was typically polyphonic and had 5 parts that were specifically chosen to be set to the polyphony, these parts included the Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, Sanctus, and the Angus Dei. (Ongaro 71). The Mass quickly became one of the most important sacred genres, constantly testing the imagination of sacred composers. A well- known mass from this period is Palestrina: Gloria, from Pope Marcellus Mass, it was composed in 1567 and uses Gloria as a setting from the Ordinary Mass. On the other hand, the Motet, is a sacred composition usually composed of Latin text and anywhere from 3 to 6 voices. (Ongaro 68). Motets were more emotion based than the mass because the lyrics behind a motet were more suitable for experimentation, giving the composers more room for emotional expression. While the Renaissance was known for its fluidity and emotional expression, the Baroque period was quite the opposite. The early Baroque years were considered mainly homophonic while the late Baroque period was generally polyphonic in texture. The music of this period was known to have <https://assignbuster.com/characteristics-of-the-renaissance-and-baroque-periods/>

a unified mood throughout the entirety of the movement, with sudden and abrupt changes in loudness. During this time masses and motets were still prominent for sacred tunes, however the rise of the opera came towards the end of this period and grew quickly. Henry Purcell became one of the most renowned opera composers of the baroque period. His most well-known opera is *Didos and Aeneas*, Composed in 1689.

While sound characteristics of the Renaissance and Baroque periods blended together in some respects, the harmonies differed completely. Harmony is “the effect we hear when two or more musical parts are played or sung together” (Ongaro 26). Consonance and dissonance are terms used to describe harmonies. Consonance is when we hear two or more notes together that give us a sense of satisfaction and ease. (Ongaro 26).

Dissonance is typically described as a misplaced sound, it is not a sound our ears are used to hearing so our brains tell us something is off with the sound combination. Renaissance music is pleasant to the ear because it has a consonance to it with controlled dissonances, as to not make the change so harsh. While the fluidity of the music sounds sweet to the ear, the musical works can sound unpleasant because the composers of this period used modes instead of the major and minor scales that we use now. Baroque Harmonies were classified as functional harmonies in the sense that they were constant and stable, the beginning and ending were typically the same with some abrupt dissonance in the middle. Functional harmonies came from a theory that stated, “each chordal identity within a tonality can be reduced to one of three harmonic functions -those of tonic, dominant, and subdominant.” (Whittall; Latham 496). The most important harmonic

advancement of the Baroque period was the change from church modes to the major and minor scales that we use now, this forever changed the composition of music.

Melody is the part of the song that is hummed by individuals because it is the most distinguishable aspect of a musical piece. The term melody in music indicates “ a series of notes that are arranged in succession in such a way to create a recognizable musical unit” (Ongaro 28). Melodic lines of the Renaissance period can be greatly different depending on the genre of music. Sacred music for example, typically had more of a unified melodic line as compared to secular music which was more fragmented. Later Renaissance melodies seemed to have more of a grasping affect on the listener, where it could easily be remembered and repeated. These melodic lines were shorter and more repetitive. Tone painting was significant during the Renaissance period on regards to the melodic line as well. Tone painting is another word for word painting, this quality bled over into the baroque period. However, the most significant aspect of the Baroque period was the addition of the basso continuo as an accompaniment to the melodic line. Basso continuo became prominent in the later years of the baroque period but the idea of a bass-line accompaniment started much earlier in the era. (Buelow 25). The figured bass accompaniment typically consisted of bass instruments such as the cello and harpsichord. The melodies of the baroque period vary more than the Renaissance because they were composed specifically for multiple voices or various instruments.

Just as the melodies differ the forms and dynamics of the Renaissance and Baroque periods differ the same. The Renaissance period was greatly varied <https://assignbuster.com/characteristics-of-the-renaissance-and-baroque-periods/>

in the aspect of form. Secular music was composed of simple forms, for example strophic form was the repetition of several stanzas of text in music. On the other hand, sacred music during this time “ did not have significant repetition of musical ideas or phrases so we call this a through-composed work” (Ongaro 37). Some significant forms of the baroque period included concertos and oratorios. Concertos combined solo voices, large scale orchestras, along with various solo instruments. Concertos were sometimes used to describe polyphonic sacred music. Oratorios were the large-scale combination of orchestras and voices, typically with a religious narrative, very similar to operas. In the baroque period Terraced dynamics became a well composed style, these dynamics played a major role in the chaotic sound this period was known for. Terraced dynamics were abrupt and sudden changes in volume without the gradual crescendos and decrescendos. (Latham 1267).

Music has been developing since the beginning of time, it has changed and advanced the art in thousands of cultures. The characteristics of the Renaissance and the Baroque periods distinguished themselves from one another in many ways. Their sounds, textures, harmonies, melodies and forms are all different making the period not only easily distinguished but unique in every aspect.

Works Cited

- Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. “ Heinrich Schütz.”
Encyclopædia Britannica , Encyclopædia Britannica, 2 Nov. 2018, www.britannica.com/biography/Heinrich-Schutz.

- Buelow, George J. *A History of Baroque Music*. Indiana University Press, 2004.
- Butt, John. “The Reformation: Classical Music’s Punk Moment.” *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 18 Aug. 2017, www.theguardian.com/music/2017/aug/18/the-reformation-classical-musics-punk-moment.
- “Functional Harmony.” *Oxford Reference*. . . . Date of access 5 Nov. 2018,
- Latham, Alison. *The Oxford Companion to Music*. Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Ongaro, Giulio Maria., and David. Brinkman. *Music of the Renaissance*. Greenwood Press, 2003.
- *Social Sciences at Hunter College (CUNY)*, maxweber. hunter. cuny. edu/pub/eres/MUS105. 00_DEFORD/BaroqueIntro. html.