

The baroque period critique essay

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Opera - " drama presented in music, with the characters singing instead of speaking" Joseph German, p. 87): One cannot speak of Baroque opera without mentioning the name of Claudio Monteverdi (1567-1643).

Monteverdi has the distinction of being known as the first great composer in the genre of opera, as well as the last true madrigals of his time. He began writing his madrigals at a very early age and composed operas well into his seventies. Although much of his music has not survived to this day, one very important assistance did; *The Coronation of Poppa*.

This opera is done in recitative style as well as aria. Recitative is when the characters half sing, half recite the words presented in an opera while being very careful to follow accents and rhythms of true speech closely. Aria is part in an opera which is penned for soloist and orchestra. The recitative is used to demonstrate plot action, dialogue, and other dramatic situations within an opera. Arias are used in an opera when elaboration of a piece is needed. The soloist can be more melodic, more consistent with the rhythm, clearer and better understood by the audience, and is usually accompanied by all of the orchestra.

It gives the soloist great use of word-painting. This is a very notable Italian opera by Monteverdi as it is relating the adulterous liaison of Poppa and Nero which triumphs, although history records that the victory was hollow. It is also very notable because of its exquisite use of recitative and arias to tell the story. This is a great piece of secular composition for the era. Concerto - One of the " most important orchestral genres of sacred music during the Baroque era" Joseph German, p. 120) (the other being concerto grosso). Concerto is the contrasting of the orchestra and soloist.

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This contrast pits the power (along with the stability) of the orchestra against virtuosity and vocal styling of the soloist. Three ways in which composers used concerto in orchestras during the Baroque period was through the various movements which they created in their music, the reiteration form which typically started off the movement, and the Baroque variation form which shows the Baroque need for predictable and structured movements. Movements essentially are sections of music which are self-contained but, are part of a larger piece.

In multi-movement works, movements " will always show variety in meter, tempo, key, mood, and musical form" (Joseph German, p. 121). The reiteration form concentrates on the contrast between orchestra and soloist. While the solo piece is faster and brilliant, the reiteration orchestral piece is heavier and forceful. Lastly, the Baroque variation form is the continuous, nonstop repetition of a single clear and precise musical unit, with changes that keep the audience interested without losing focus of the original musical theme. It should be further noted that Baroque variations have patterns.

They tend to be resent over repeating bass patterns. These repeating bass patterns are called basso station. Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741) was the best of the best in concerto. His Violin Concerto in G demonstrates this clearly and evidently in its first movement. It is a triple-meter movement done in reiteration. There is a contrasting solo violin, virtuoso solo violin, then it becomes more expressive, then even freer, very fast, then he pulls it back in line at the end. It is a great representation of orchestra using the reiteration form.

Oratorio - " an opera on a religious subject, such as an Old Testament story or the life of a saint" (Joseph German, p. 144). This genre of music was the most operatic of any other religious music during the Baroque period. This a sacred genre of music. Oratorio is comprised of chorus, orchestra, and the all important solo voices. Also, oratorios were usually done without the benefit of scenery, costumes, or even acting for that matter. They were never stage as operas were, but had plots which were narrative, several acts, real characters, and action which was implied.

The text of an oratorio is based upon scripture and takes over the operatic features of recitatives and arias. However, it also uses the chorus which played little role in the Italian operas of the era. Most religious genres of the time were written for church services but, the oratorio was more like a second musical religious service in that it was primarily used as a form of entertainment instead of opera for religious services such as Lent. Since it was not intended for liturgical uses, oratorios could be performed in churches as well as concert halls.

George Frederic Handel (1685-1759) was the one who popularized oratorios after Italian opera began to meet its demise. He was the composer of the Messiah which is still performed today and, can be noted that it is the only composition of that era that has continually been performed since its original appearance. The Messiah is a wonderful piece of oratorio, full of enjoyable nuances in the orchestral as well as the choral parts. It is those nuances which bring emotion to the theme redemption as well as the theme of salvation. It contains melodies of interspersed choral with soaring soprano solos mixed with, alto, tenor and bass.

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When you listen you will note that there are clear-cut melodies throughout, which alternate between the previously mentioned soaring notes and pomp and circumstances of nobility. It can be heard that brass plays a very great role in the orchestra. It is still one of the most famous classical pieces that exists. I believe this might be due to Handel's almost flawless use of oratorio form. Not typical of other oratorios, Messiah does not rely on characters to depict the story in recitative and arias, but the text is Biblical. This makes it a piece from the sacred genre but, a piece that has endured the ages and still delights the multitudes.