

# Reflection essay on baroque music

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According to Craig Wright, ““ baroque” is the term used to describe the art, architecture, dance and music of the period 1600 to 1750 (Wright, 97). ” The sound has been described as “ rough, bold [and] instrumental” (Ibid). Originally, the term “ baroque” was pejorative (Ibid). One of the main traits of baroque art and architecture, that extends itself to the music of the period, is massiveness. Everything in baroque society was larger than life. Grandiose was also a term that was used to define the music of the period.

With this grandiosity was also an attention to detail that showed itself in “ vigorous, pulsating rhythms with strong, regular beats and many smaller subdivisions (Ibid). ” During the baroque period, there was much development and innovation in the field of music. During this time, three musical forms developed and reached their zenith, the Baroque Opera, Concerto Grosso, and the Cantata. These three forms were best represented by Claudio Monteverdi, Antonio Vivaldi, and Johann Sebastian Bach. The first form that came to innovation was the Baroque Opera. This was best exemplified by the operas of Claudio Monteverdi.

One of his operas was The Coronation of Poppea. In it, you hear the swelling melodies and subtle undertones that define baroque music. Though it is one of Monteverdi’s last compositions, many critics view it as one of his best, sowing the seeds for all future Italian opera. Tim Smith of the Baltimore Sun notes that “[t]his is a pinnacle of early baroque style (Smith, 2009). ” Craig Wright states that Monteverdi and other composers of early opera used a particular style to convey heightened passions. It was a “ new, more expressive and flexible style of solo singing for the stage called *stile rappresentativo* (Wright, 107).

” This form allowed the singer to move from one mood to another without alerting the viewer to the subtle changes in mood. This was a key component of baroque music, as one of the key aims of baroque is to create emotion in the listener and to give a sense of grandness to the vocal production. Eventually, “ *stile rappresentativo* would soon be transformed into two different and contrasting types of vocal writing, recitative and aria (Ibid). ” The second form of baroque music that emerged during this time period was *concerto grosso*.

According to the Encyclopedia Britannica, *concerto grosso* was “ characterized by a contrast between a small group of soloists and the full orchestra (Britannica, 2009). It flourished eventually as secular music for the royal court (Ibid). Britannica says that the typical “ instrumentation...was that of the *trio sonata* (Ibid). ” It consisted of two violins, a bass string instrument and a harmonizing instrument like a harpsichord. “ Wind instruments were also common (Ibid). ” The number of movements for the *concerto* varied depending on the composer. Some had three movements, others had four.

The fast movements “ often used a *ritornello* structure, in which a recurrent section, or *ritornello*, alternates with episodes, or contrasting sections played by soloists (Ibid). ” The composer best known for this form was Antonio Vivaldi. Vivaldi’s greatest concertos are the series known as the *Four Seasons*. More than 150 recordings have been made of the *Four Seasons* alone. In his works, you can hear the melodies and subtleties that make up baroque music. The final form of music that was developed during this time

was the cantata. The cantata was a form first used by the Italians, and was later adopted by Johann Sebastian Bach.

Though Bach never called them cantatas, they were considered such due to their structure. According to the Encyclopedia Britannica, Bach rejected calling his works cantatas because that connoted secular music, and if there was something that Bach was not, it was secular. When one listens to Bach's music, one can hear the massiveness of the sound that is obviously designed for a church and for a multi-voiced orchestra. Under Bach, " the music of the Baroque reaches its greatest glory (Wright, 127). " He was a great virtuoso on the organ, studying his craft by listening to others and even traveling hundreds of miles just to hear a performance.

He was a composer of church music, and later became a court conductor. One of Bach's greatest known cantatas is a seven-movement work known as *Awake, a Voice is Calling*. It is a more formalized structure, with movements one, four, and seven being choruses, movements two and five being recitatives and movements three and six aria duets. This piece is a chorale piece, which is a spiritual melody or religious folk song (Ibid). The Baroque period, while a young period in musical history is full of new and innovative developments.

The opera, the concerto grosso, and the cantata are all innovative developments in music that show us how our rich musical history developed and changed over the hundreds of years that we have been maintaining our musical heritage. We need to embrace and encourage our musical growth and musical challenges so we may continue to grow as a culture

. Smith, Tim. " Opera Vivente tackles timeless 'Coronation of Poppea'. " Baltimore Sun 09 Mar 2009 Web. 18 Apr 2009. . Wright, Craig. Listening to Music. Second Edition. St. Paul: West Publishing, 1996. Print. Josquin Desprez was a giant of Renaissance music. According to Craig Wright, he was the greatest composer of the Renaissance or any age. He was born on the border between modern France and Belgium and died in the same region.

He was attracted to Italy for the same reason many other composers were attracted to the region—professional and monetary gain (Wright, 86). He worked consistently as a singer at the cathedral of Milan, the chapel of a cardinal in Rome, the Sistine Chapel of the pope, and in the chapel of the Duke of Ferrara. According to Wright, he “ possessed a temperamental, egotistical spirit typical of many artists of the Renaissance: He composed only when he, not his patron wished; he demanded a salary twice that of composers only slightly less gifted; and he would break into a rage when singers tried to tamper with the notes he had written (86).

” One patron threatened to throw him in prison if he did not stop composing for outside clients, yet he was recognized for his genius. He was praised by contemporary humanists of the time, and he was a favorite of Martin Luther, who said in essence, that Josquin mastered the notes; the notes did not master him (Ibid). “ Josquin wrote more than twenty settings of the Ordinary of the Mass and a large number of French chansons (Ibid). ” According to Wright, he especially excelled in a form called the motet.

A motet is a composition written for a choir, setting a Latin text on a sacred subject. It was intended to be sung in a church or chapel or at home in a private devotion. Most were sung a capella, which literally means “ in the  
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chapel (Ibid). " This means that they were performed by voice alone, without any instrumentals. Instruments other than the organ were not allowed in churches during the Renaissance (Ibid). This clean, a capella sound accounted for the " often serene quality of the sound of Renaissance sacred music (Ibid).

" Wright states that the Renaissance is often called " the golden age of a capella singing (Ibid). " It is in this setting that Josquin wrote Mille Regretz, a beautiful a capella piece that brings male and female voices together in harmony. The male and female voices play off each other, pulling the listener into the music and the gentle harmonies that are displayed. Josquin's talent is evident, as the music has clean lines and tones, and the notes are precise and well-toned to blend together flawlessly.

The first voices you hear are the male and female voices in harmony, and then it seems as if the female voice takes over, but there is a subtle bass to the tones, then the men dominate the piece while the women play a supporting role. Next the men and women are in harmony together, blending and rising their voices in a slightly mournful tune reminiscent of the Ave Maria. This piece speaks very well to the time period in which it was written.

Mille Regretz means " A Thousand Regrets" in Italian, and it would seem as though this religious piece plays to the penance one would have to pay for their sins. There is a great emphasis placed on the polyphonic nature of the tones, and the multitonalism that results from the blending of the voices; all characteristic of Renaissance religious music. This piece probably represents Josquin at his height, as a power player in the courts and chapels of Italy.

Listening to this piece, there is no reason to doubt his standing as one of the premier composers of his day, and this piece attests to it.

This has the a capella quality that was desirous in Renaissance music, and there are few voices involved, which means that it was most likely meant for a small chapel and not for a grand cathedral. Josquin accomplished his goal of creating peaceful, religious music that soothes the soul and easily defined the time period in which it was popular. Then there is the quality of imitation involved. Josquin used this technique often. Imitation is a process “ whereby one or more voices duplicate in turn the notes of a melody (Ibid).

” You can clearly hear the imitation by the male and female voices as they move through the piece. In Josquin’s imitative writing, all the voices have a chance to equally present the melodic material and all are of equal importance (Ibid). You can also clearly hear the “ point-counterpoint” pattern in the singing that is common when the voices are working together to compliment each other. The sound produced would, on paper, appear to be discordant, but is far from such, as the “ point-counterpoint” creates a harmony that belies what is placed on the paper.

The voices work smoothly together to create a cohesive whole, so the piece comes together as a masterwork. Josquin’s work was a sublime effort despite his temperamental soul. Though he may have been tormented by having to achieve perfection, his works show he did just that. We can look at his music and clearly see the liturgical future that music took. He was a pioneer in sacred music, and his contributions must continue to be appreciated for how it speaks to us and our musical future. Works Cited Wright, Craig. Listening to Music. Second Edition. St. Paul: West Publishing, 1996. Print.

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