Chapter 6

The Baroque Era
1600 - 1750 A.D.
The Term, “Baroque”

Formerly had a negative connotation.

- Jewelers--irregular pearl
- Philosophers--tortuous forms of argument

Today refers to creative works of the early 18th century recognized for their grandeur, depth, and technical mastery.
Life in the Baroque Era

Absolute monarchies existed throughout Europe. They controlled all aspects of life in their kingdoms. Louis XIV of France was best example. Throughout Europe, life was controlled by a strict social hierarchy, rigid laws, and elaborate codes of dress.
Life in the Baroque Era

A period of international peace and economic expansion
No major wars, even if there were problems with political repression, punitive taxation, and gross social inequalities
Life in the Baroque Era

Scientific thinking came to the fore.

- Scientists tested their ideas with measurement and mathematical analysis.
- Sir Isaac Newton was the foremost scientist of the age.
  - Discovered gravity.
  - Developed calculus.
  - Determined white light is made up of all colors of the spectrum.
Life in the Baroque Era

Philosophers began to apply mathematical analysis to human thought.
Order and organization were highly valued in society and in the arts.
Baroque artists sought to classify and express specific emotions to their audiences.
Baroque Art

The Palace at Versailles (Louis XIV) is the most impressive building of this period (built in the mid-1600s).

- Grand and symmetrical with almost 1000 rooms
- Geometrically organized landscape with pools, trees and elegant gardens
Baroque Art

Contrast and illusion are dominant forces in painting (e.g., contrasts between light and shade).

Illusion = ability to imitate reality artistically.

Strong interest in balance, order, and organization
Musical Audiences in the Baroque Era

Small, elite aristocratic audiences gave way to more public types of venues with the advent of opera. Subscription concerts were organized. Public opera houses were built in Venice and Rome. The first public concert series was organized in London, and others were held in France and Germany.
Baroque Music

Emphasis on contrasts is very important.
The concerto is a good example of this contrast.

- Small groups of soloists contrast with the larger orchestra (tutti) in concerti grossi.
- Soloists contrast with the orchestra in solo concertos.
Baroque Music

Contrasts in dynamics were also popular, creating an “echo” effect. Music from this era became the first music to be played regularly on modern concert programs. Opera involved dramatic music, stage machinery, gorgeous costumes, beautiful stage sets, moving stories, and expressive acting.
Baroque Music

Music was designed to be highly emotional.

Early Baroque music involved excitement and experimentation. Baroque music involved expressiveness and great originality.

Certain melodic and harmonic patterns came to be associated with particular feelings.
Baroque Music

The excitement and originality was balanced with more rigid formal designs.

- Music was metrical with measures and bar lines.
- Modes gave way to major and minor scales.

Later Baroque music focused more on organization and control than experimentation.
Baroque Music

Late Baroque music characterized by rhythmic vitality. Rhythmic pulse was driving and regular changes in chords (harmonic motion) occurred.

One unifying factor in all Baroque music was the bass line.

- **Basso continuo** = low melodic instrument (like cello) and keyboard (harpsichord).
Baroque Music: Musical Forms

**Operas**—with dramatic music, staging, lighting, and costumes
- Form involved recitatives and arias.

**Cantatas**—very short, unstaged operas
- Church cantatas were based on liturgical themes and performed in church on Sundays.
- Chamber cantatas were secular and were performed in the salon or small music room.
Baroque Music: Musical Forms

Oratorio--opera-like work on religious theme, but not staged

Passion--similar to an oratorio, based on the last days of Jesus’ life

Chorale: Protestant hymn sung in unison by the entire congregation, with a simple melody and regular rhythm
Baroque Music: Musical Forms

Concertos—contrasted the soloist(s) with the larger orchestra (also called *tutti* or *ripieno*).

- **Concerto grosso**—orchestra with small group of soloists
- **Solo concerto**—orchestra with single soloist
Baroque Music: Musical Forms

Sonatas--compositions designed for a smaller group of instruments than an orchestra

- **Sonata da camera**--chamber sonata based on dance rhythms
- **Sonata da chiesa**--church sonata based with slow and fast movements

Dance Suite--series of short, contrasting dance movements
Early Baroque: 1600-1700 A.D.

A new development was **monody**—a single voice with basso continuo that imitated the natural rhythms of impassioned speech.

- Composed for sacred and secular texts.
- Single voice part moves freely and flexibly above the bass.

Monody and polyphony existed side by side in this period of music history.
Early Baroque: Early Composers

Francesca Caccini (1587-c.1640)
- Principal composer at the court of Tuscany in northern Italy
- Singer, poet (Latin and Italian), instrumentalist (3 instruments)
- Early composer of monody
Early Baroque: Early Composers

Claudio Monteverdi (1567-1643)

- Wrote many pieces in Renaissance style, especially madrigals.
- First great opera composer of the Baroque era.
- Composed *Orfeo*—first opera of the Baroque era.
Based on the ancient Greek myth of Orpheus and Euridice.

- Euridice dies from a snake bite, and Orpheus pleads with the King of the Underworld to let her return to earth. He agrees, but only if Orpheus does not look at her as they come up from the Underworld. Orpheus can’t resist turning back, and Euridice is lost forever.
Orfeo

Includes madrigal-like choruses, dances, and instrumental interludes. **Recitative** is a striking feature.
- Sung in monody--solo singer with basso continuo accompaniment.
- Designed to mirror the emotional state of the character.
- Can be simple or elaborate.
Orfeo--Musical Example

Contains an instrumental ritornello—a passage that appears in several places in the musical work; played by the orchestra.

Includes a choral dance in two sections.

- First section is in duple meter and is based on imitative phrases that mimic the movement of dancers.
- Second section is in triple meter and is homophonic.
Opera in the 17th Century

During the Baroque era, recitatives gradually became more distinct—some parts were lyrical and songlike, and some were more straightforward and conversational.

- **Aria**—the lyrical, songlike part
- **Recitative**—the straightforward, conversational part
Opera in the 17th Century

**Arias** -- written in set forms with a fixed pattern of repetition.
- **ABA form** (B section is contrasted with A which repeats after B.)
- **Ground bass form** -- single phrase in the bass is repeated over and over again while the voice sings a melody above it.
Opera in the 17th Century

**Arias**—accompanied by full orchestra.

**Recitatives**—accompanied by basso continuo (low melodic instrument such as cello) and harpsichord.
Opera in the 17th Century

**Arias**—contemplative or passionate moments; explore emotional content

**Recitatives**—dialogue and quick interchanges between people in the drama
English Opera--Background

Music was highly fragmented because the political situation in England was unstable. Conflict between Puritans (religious purists) and Round Heads (loyal royalists).

English Civil War--1642-1649. Charles I was beheaded; Oliver Cromwell (a Puritan) came to power.
English Opera---Background

Under Cromwell:

- Most musical positions were abolished.
- Theaters and opera houses were closed.

Charles II returned from France and became King--called the "Restoration."

Musical life in England was reborn with King Charles II.
Henry Purcell (1659-1695)

Most talented English composer of late 17th century
Organist at Westminster Abbey in London
Henry Purcell (1659-1695)

Wrote vocal and instrumental music.

- Sacred music for Anglican church
- Secular songs and cantatas
- Chamber music
- Solo harpsichord music
- Opera---*Dido and Aeneas*
**Dido and Aeneas**

Based on part of the Roman epic poem, the *Aeneid* by Virgil. Tells story of love affair between Dido, the Queen of Carthage, and Aeneas, a mythical Trojan warrior. Aeneas abandons Dido, and she commits suicide.

In three acts, but takes only about an hour to perform.
Dido and Aeneas

Includes arias, recitatives, choruses, dances, and instrumental interludes. Requires four principal singers and a small orchestra of strings and harpsichord. Most famous aria is Dido’s Lament.
Dido and Aeneas: Dido’s Lament

Based on a **ground bass**, which is heard alone after the preceding recitative.

Ground bass occurs 11 times in the aria.

Bass descends down the scale by half steps.

Rhythm is in whole and half notes with a shift in measure 4.

Bass is five measures long, rather than the usual four or eight.
Rise of Instrumental Music: Sonata

A chamber piece of several contrasting movements written for a small number of instruments.

- **Solo sonata** -- for a single instrument
- **Trio sonata** -- for two instruments and basso continuo (low melodic instrument plus harpsichord)
Trio Sonatas: Two Types

If based on dance rhythms, called *sonata da camera* ("chamber sonata").

If more serious, called *sonata da chiesa* ("church sonata").
Instrumental Music: The Concerto

Two types of concertos:

- **Solo concerto**--one solo performer plays with the orchestra
- **Concerto grosso**--several soloists play with the orchestra.

Most often 2 violins and basso continuo were soloists, but other groups were possible.

Orchestra consisted of violins, violas, cellos, and basso continuo.
Solo concertos led to extremely virtuosic playing--”showing off.” Composers wrote concertos so that the soloist could show technical prowess and “Wow!” the audience.
Arcangelo Corelli (1653-1713)

One of first composers to become famous for writing exclusively instrumental music.
Concentrated entirely on violin music.
Wrote only sonatas and concertos.
Was a violin virtuoso himself.
Expanded the technique of violin playing, using repeated notes, fast scales, and double stops.
French Baroque Music

Louis XIV reigned for 72 years, and he was an avid supporter of the arts. He loved to dance. Dance music was featured prominently in French opera. French dances influenced instrumental music throughout Europe.
French Baroque Music

Dance influenced music in 2 main ways:

- French opera included a great deal of ballet.

  Most important composer of French opera was Jean-Baptiste Lully (1632-1687), the king’s music director.

- Dance forms were put together in groups as independent instrumental music.
French Baroque Dances

**Allemande**—duple meter, moderate tempo, continuous motion

**Bourrée**—duple meter, moderate to fast tempo, short, distinct phrases

**Courante**—triple meter, moderate to fast tempo, motion often in running scales
French Baroque Dances

- **Gavotte**—duple meter, moderate to fast tempo, “bouncy” sound
- **Gigue**—usually in 6/8 meter, fast tempo, lively, and often imitative
- **Minuet**—triple meter, moderate tempo, elegant
- **Sarabande**—triple meter, slow tempo, stately character with accent on second beat
French Baroque Dances

Series of dances put together was called a **dance suite**.

- Usually all dances in same key.
- Composers of French Suites:
  - François Couperin (1668-1733)
  - Elisabeth-Claude Jacquet de la Guerre (1667-1729)--one of the first women to publish widely in French music and to be recognized in her own lifetime
The Late Baroque

The period between 1700 and 1750 A.D.

Forms that were established in the 1600s were developed and enhanced by the foremost composers of the late Baroque Period: Vivaldi, J.S. Bach, and Handel.
Late Baroque Opera

Favorite type of opera throughout Europe was Italian opera. Main form of Italian opera was *opera seria*—"serious opera."

- Plots were often standard, based on some story from ancient history involving dramatic situations with two pairs of lovers, and a prince or king who saves the day at the end.
Late Baroque Opera

Recitatives continued to carry the plot forward.

- Simple, fast, and speech-like, accompanied by basso continuo

Arias were the reason people liked the opera—elaborate songs in which the greater singers displayed their virtuosity.

- Each opera had 3 or 4 arias for each main character.
Late Baroque Arias

Standard form was **ABA (Da Capo Aria)**.

- A section set the mood.
- B section provided contrast.
- A section (da capo) repeated the first section, but was often embellished and ornamented.
Late Baroque Concertos

Came to have a fixed form by the beginning of the 18th century. Solo concerto became much more popular, but concerti grossi were still written.

Main instruments were flute, oboe, and trumpet, along with violin. Even keyboard became a solo instrument, rather than just part of the basso continuo.
Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741)

Father was a violinist at St. Mark’s Cathedral in Venice.
Learned music at an early age.
Trained for the priesthood; called “The Red Priest” because of his red hair.
Became director of music at the Ospedale della Pietà in Venice—a residential school for orphaned girls.
Composed much music for the girls to perform.
Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741)

Compositions include:
- Solo and trio sonatas
- Oratorios
- Sacred music
- Approximately 600 concertos.

Concertos: mostly for one or more violins, but also used unusual instruments like recorder, clarinet, bassoon, viola, and mandolin.
Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741)

Most famous concertos are in a group called the *Four Seasons* (1725).
- Solo concertos which have passages in which other instruments of the orchestra join with the soloist
- Early instances of program music—music that tells a story
- Each represents one season of the year and starts with a poem about that season. Lines of the poem are in the musical score.
Concerto Form of the Late Baroque

Three movements--fast, slow, fast
First movement is usually Allegro (moderately fast tempo).
Second movement is expressive with a slow melody that sounds like an aria.
Third movement is a little faster and livelier than the first.
Concerto Form of the Late Baroque

First and third movements are in ritornello form. This form exploits the contrast between soloists and orchestra. The ritornello is an orchestral passage that repeats over and over throughout the movement. Between statements of the ritornello are solo passages, known as episodes.
Concerto Form of the Late Baroque

At the beginning of the movement, the ritornello is played in the tonic or home key.

It returns many times in the movement but in different keys; may be a partial or a full statement.

The last statement of the ritornello is in the home key again, and it is a full statement of the music.

The solo episodes help move the piece through the various keys.
Vivaldi’s Violin Concerto: \textit{La Primavera}

Three movements—fast, slow, fast. First and third movements are in ritornello form in E major. Second movement has a long lyrical melody and is in E minor. Instruments of the orchestra join the soloist during some episodes. Based on a sonnet—a 14 line poem.
Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

One of the most influential composer of Western Art Music
Date of his death marks the end of the Baroque Period.
Lived in Germany.
Wrote most of his music “to order-” at the request of the person who employed him.
Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

First job: church organist in the towns of Arnstadt and Mühlhausen near where he was born

Next position: at court of Duke of Weimar—organist and later as orchestra leader

Next position: orchestra director at court of Prince of Cöthen

Last position: Music Director at St. Thomas’ Church in Leipzig
Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

At Leipzig he had several duties:

- Compose and direct a new church cantata for every Sunday and feast day of the year
- Head of the music school attached to St. Thomas’ Church

Composed, taught Latin, played the organ, maintained all the instruments, and prepared choirs for the 3 other churches in Leipzig
Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Composed in all Baroque instrumental and vocal styles except opera. Was a master of counterpoint; works served as models for composers and students who came after him.
Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Wrote different types of music depending on his job:
- Early years--organ music
- Middle years--keyboard and instrumental music
- Final Years--religious choral music and some final instrumental works.
Bach’s Organ Music

Settings of Lutheran Chorales
- Either set in harmony for organ or used as the basis for a series of variations.

Organ trio sonatas
- Right hand plays one line, left hand plays another, pedals are basso continuo.
Bach’s Organ Music

Preludes and Fugues

- Prelude--sometimes called “toccata” or “fantasia.”
  A rambling, improvisatory piece that organists play to fill in time during a church service
Bach’s Organ
Music

Preludes and Fugues

- **Fugue**—a polyphonic composition with a theme (the “subject”)
- Can have 2, 3, or 4 voices.
- Starts with one voice playing the subject; second voice plays the subject while the first continues; third enters with subject; etc. Continues until all voices move independently. Ends with a final statement of the subject.
Bach’s Keyboard, Instrumental, and Orchestral Music

Much of this music was produced while Bach was a Cöthen. Melded characteristics of French, Italian, and German styles.

- French-dance forms and ornamentation
- Italian—rhythmic drive and brilliance
- German—serious and contrapuntal
Bach’s Keyboard, Instrumental, and Orchestral Music

Solo music

- Suites and sonatas for solo violin and solo harpsichord
- Suites for solo cells
- A suite for solo flute

Several sonatas and trio sonatas

Cöthen years—large orchestral compositions, suites for orchestra, *Brandenburg Concertos*
Bach’s Vocal Church Music

During Leipzig years, wrote hundreds of cantatas for church services.

Wrote several sacred choral pieces.

- 2 Passions (depicting the death and resurrection of Christ)—*St. Matthew Passion*—most famous
- *Mass in B Minor*
- *Motets*
Bach: *St. Matthew Passion*

Lasts 3 hours.

For solo singers, two choruses, one boys’ choir, two orchestras, and two organs.

Illustrates how music can reflect and deepen the meaning of human existence.
Bach: *St. Matthew Passion* -- excerpt

Role of narrator is performed by the "Evangelist."
- Sings in recitative style with simple continuo accompaniment.

Chorus is responses of the 12 disciples.
Begins with a soprano aria that reflects the theme that Jesus was the sacrifice for all.
Ends with a plain harmonic chorale.
George Frideric Handel (1685-1759)

Career was remarkably different from Bach’s, but their lives overlapped almost exactly. While Bach lived in a small region in Germany, Handel traveled widely through Europe and became an international celebrity.

Career was built on the nearly 40 operas he wrote for the London stage.
George Frideric Handel (1685-1759)

Born in Halle, Germany, to a non-musical family. Father wanted him to study law, and he tried; he abandoned it after only one year.

Was allowed to study music with the music director and organist of the local church, learning to play organ, harpsichord, and violin.

Also studied counterpoint and composition.
George Frideric Handel (1685-1759)

After quitting his law studies at the University of Halle, he went to Hamburg, Germany--the main center of German opera.

Became a violinist and harpsichordist for the Hamburg opera orchestra.

Composed his first opera at age 19; performed at the Hamburg opera house.

Traveled to Italy at 21 to be in the center of opera.
George Frideric Handel (1685-1759)

Stayed in Italy 3 years, and then went back to Hamburg to be the music director to the Elector of Hanover.

Traveled to London several times. In 1712 he took a leave of absence to go to London and never came back!

Became friends with the Queen of England; the Elector of Hanover became King George I later.

King George I employed him again.
George Frideric Handel (1685-1759)

Buried in Westminster Abbey---a place of honor!
During the London years he composed mainly operas and oratorios.
Music is less complex than Bach’s music with more focus on melody and less focus on counterpoint.
People loved him and his music during his lifetime.
George Frideric Handel (1685-1759)

Famous oratorios:
- Saul
- Messiah (his most popular work ever)

Famous Dance Suites:
- Water Music (for King George’s party on the Thames)
- Music for the Royal Fireworks
Handel’s Music

Attractive and easy to listen to because it sounds simple and tuneful

Was famous in his own day for his Italian operas, but people of today do not know them as well as his oratorios.

Main musical forms of his operas are da capo (ABA) arias and recitatives.
Handel’s Music

Choruses are central in Handel’s oratorios.

Most famous chorus is from the *Messiah*--the “Halleluyah Chorus.”

*Messiah* is in 3 parts and takes 2 and 1/2 hours to perform.

Music consists of recitatives, arias, and choruses.
Handel’s Music--"Halleluyah Chorus"--example

Comes as the climax of Part II of the oratorio.
Uses a variety of textures: unison, homophony, polyphony, and imitation.
Uses a variety of rhythms to set the main word in the text: “Halleluyah!”
Alternates blocks of dominant and tonic harmonies throughout.
Handel’s Music—"Halleluyah Chorus"—example

Two main treatments of the text in 9 sections using various textures:

- Declamatory statements with long note values and occasional unison singing.
- Contrapuntal responses with faster notes; offers musical and textual commentary on the declamatory statements.
Fundamentals of Baroque Music: Summary

Instrumental music is as important as vocal music.

Opera was invented; forms included recitative and aria.

Unifying feature = basso continuo.

Principal vocal genres = opera, cantata, and oratorio.

Principal instrumental genres = sonata, suite, and concerto.

Music uses tonal harmony (hierarchy of chords and keys).