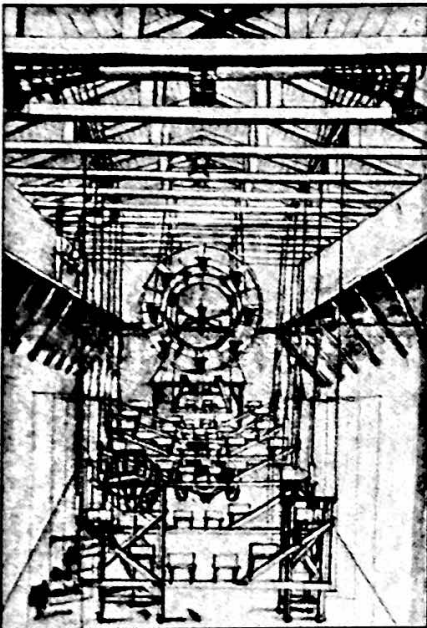


Opera



The public's desire for spectacular productions was so great that elaborate stage machinery had to be invented to achieve the desired effects. In the picture on the top, a god is descending from the heavens on his cloud; the picture below shows the machinery needed to make this happen.

Composers had to write different types of music for an Opera: arias for solo voices, choruses and ensembles for groups of voices, and recitative (pronounced *re-sih-ta-téev*), which is speech-like singing used for dialogue, or to advance the plot. Baroque composer used arias when they wanted the characters to express their feelings. Usually accompanied by orchestra, they were melodic, long, and very elaborate. They became a showcase for the virtuoso vocal talents of the singers. In contrast, recitative imitates and exaggerates the melodies of normal speech, the way the voice rises asking a question, for instance, or lowers when communicating a secret. It was used at places in the opera when the words needed to be emphasized.

Opera's combination of music and theatricality was perfect for the Baroque spirit. It immediately became popular and spread quickly across Europe. Originally an Italian art form, different kinds of opera developed in different places. Lully, at the court of Louis XIV, developed a French opera style, which stressed the orchestra and chorus, and did not lean so heavily on the soloists. In England, Henry Purcell wrote many operas for Charles II and his successors, and his *Dido and Aeneas* is still performed.



This opera is being performed at the palace of the French ambassador to Rome in 1729. Going to the opera was a regular event for the aristocracy. Notice the splendid set and the size of the decorations.

Cantatas

The early cantatas, called chamber cantatas, were originally devised just for one or two solo voices with a few instruments. As the form developed, more voices and orchestral accompaniment were added. They were really short, unstaged operas, i.e., no costumes, no scenery, no stage, in fact. They told short stories of love lost and love regained, for example, and were perfect for small concert halls or salons.

The later cantatas, or church cantatas, were elaborate pieces that generally told stories from the Bible. Some parts were sung by the choir and others by solo voices. The composer might also include a chorale, a simpler tune for the congregation to sing. The most famous church cantatas, over 200, were written by J.S. Bach.

Chorales

Chorales were an important feature of the Protestant church service. They were simple hymn tunes, often melodies that came from much earlier periods, and they could be sung by the whole congregation in their own language. Baroque composers included chorales in their church cantatas, and often built instrumental versions of the chorale into their other music. Bach in particular used many chorales in his cantatas.

Oratorios

Oratorios are large-scale works like operas. They are always based on religious stories, and they are never staged. A narrator sings the story, and other people sing the words of the characters in the story. There is always a large part for the chorus as well. Sometimes oratorios are performed in churches, but concert hall performances are even more likely. Handel is perhaps the most famous composer of oratorios, and his *Messiah* is performed every Christmas and Easter in communities all over the Western world.

Keyboard forms

Baroque keyboard forms were of two kinds. The first type, including preludes, toccatas and fantasias, was based on **harmony**. These pieces incorporated a great deal of improvisation, and were intended as a showcase for the talents of the performer. Bach's *Tocatta and Fugue in D minor* is a well-known organ piece.

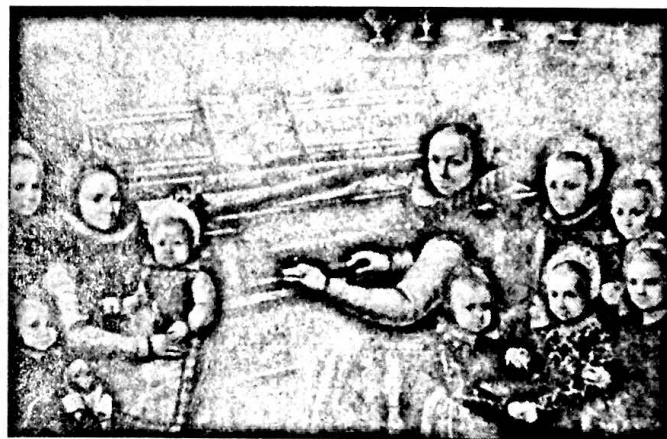
The second type included fugues and inventions, which used the **counterpoint** technique. Inventions are short pieces written for keyboard with two or three parts. Fugues may be written for keyboard, or chorus, or even for a whole orchestra. There may be any number of parts, but there must at least be two, and four is most commonly found. These parts are layered one on top of another, and we hear them all at the same time. This is what we call counterpoint. The fugue is based on one musical idea or subject, which, after being examined from all angles, turned inside out and backwards in all the different parts, is then resolved by a final decisive return to the subject at the end of the work.

Harmony is the combining of notes to form chords, and the rules governing the relationship of different chords to each other form the basic grammar of musical language.

Counterpoint is the style of music in which two or more melodies are played at the same time.



Man Playing the Harpsichord, by Gonzalez Coques



This woman is playing another member of the harpsichord family called the virginal. It was small and popular for family use.

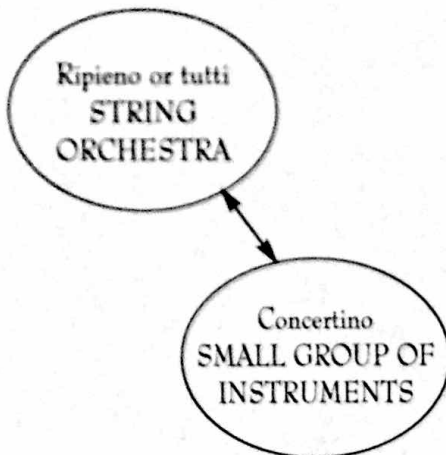
The *Tocatta and Fugue in D minor* may owe some of its fame to the fact that Walt Disney included it in his classic 1940 film *Fantasia*.

The Music Lesson, by Jan Steen

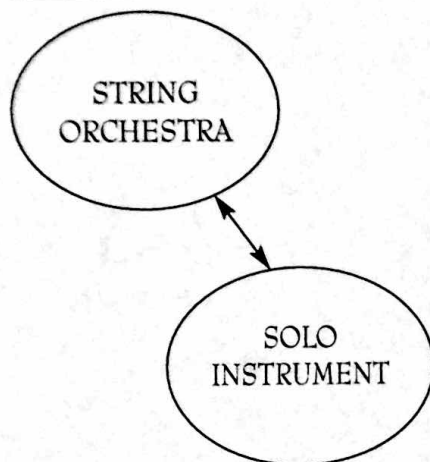


Concertos

Concerto grosso



Solo concerto



Musical pieces called concertos became popular at the beginning of the 1600s, but the term was then loosely used to describe music written for mixed groups of instruments or singers, or both. Often the contrasting sounds of the different instruments were set in opposition to each other. By the late 1600s, a particular kind of concerto, the concerto grosso, appeared. This type of concerto used a string orchestra, called the *ripieno* or the *tutti*, meaning "full" or "all", in contrast to and together with a smaller solo group, called the *concertino*. This was made up of strings, wind instruments, or a combination. The solo concerto was a development of the concerto grosso in which solo instruments replaced the concertino. They were very popular as show pieces for the soloists to exhibit their talents.

Concertos are based on contrast, which is achieved in two different ways. First of all, the movements of the concerto are all in different tempos, different moods. And then there is the interplay between the instruments. In the solo concerto, a single instrument plays with the orchestra. Vivaldi's work *The Four Seasons* is a good example. It is made up of four separate solo concertos; in each of them, a violin and a small string orchestra describe the different moods of the year's seasons. In the concerto grosso, a small group of instruments plays against the rest of the orchestra. Bach's *Brandenburg Concertos* are very well known examples.

Sonatas

The sonata as it existed in the Baroque period was a piece of chamber music designed for up to half a dozen instruments. It had several short movements in different forms. Trio sonatas were extremely popular. They were written for three parts, most commonly two violins and basso continuo. You would think a trio sonata is played by three musicians, but since the continuo part also includes a harpsichord player, there are actually four musicians needed to play one. The most common combination was two violins and cello, although others were possible — flute, violin and cello, or two oboes and bassoon, for example, always including a keyboard instrument. Solo sonatas require three players: one soloist and two on continuo, and were written for all the popular instruments of the time.

A composer and the four musicians required to play his trio sonata



Dance suites

Dance suites were originally a series of dance movements put together for an evening of dancing. By the Baroque era, though, they became independent instrumental pieces no longer intended for dancing. The word suite was used in both French and English, but the Italian word *partita* was also common.

The suite usually contained at least four dances with different tempos and rhythms, most frequently the *allemande*, the *courante*, the *sarabande* and the *gigue*. Between the slow *sarabande* and the fast *gigue*, however, the composer could also include other dances like the *gavotte*, the *bourrée* and the *musette*. One of the most popular additions was the *minuet*, a graceful movement in $\frac{3}{4}$ time. Generations of piano students have honed their skills on the minuets included in their music books.

The suite reached its high point under Bach. He wrote three series of suites for keyboard, the *French* and *English Suites* and the *Partitas*, and suites for other instruments and the whole orchestra as well. Handel's *Water Music* and *Music for the Royal Fireworks* are two of the most famous suites for orchestra. The popularity of the suite died down after the Baroque period when the enthusiasm of later composers was captured by the *sonata* and the *symphony*.

Suite: *Allemande*

Courante

Sarabande

Choice of:

Gavotte

Rigaudon

Bourrée

Musette

Passepied

Minuet

Gigue

Bach's *First Partita*, for example, includes the following dances:

Prelude

Allemande

Courante

Sarabande

Minuet I and II

Gigue

Dancers performing the minuet



The instrumental suite is based on different dance forms and rhythms, like the famous minuet.



The *sarabande* is a dignified and graceful dance that probably originated in Spain.