

FORMS, STYLES AND PERIODS

BAROQUE MUSIC 1

The term Baroque is often used to refer to the highly ornamented style of architecture and art fashionable in the 17th century, as well as to the style of music composed around that time.

You will already be familiar with some of the main characteristics of Baroque music as these would have been part of the National 5 Music course. If you want to revise concepts from previous levels, you can refer to the *BrightRED National 5 Music Study Guide*.

CHARACTERISTICS OF BAROQUE MUSIC

Common characteristics of Baroque music include:

- long flowing melodies, often with sequences
- ornaments such as trills and mordents
- contrapuntal (or polyphonic) textures, including the use of imitation

A trill is a very quick alternation between two notes which are a step apart.

In music notation a trill is generally indicated by the abbreviation **tr**. Sometimes this is followed by a wavy line to indicate the length of the trill.

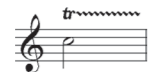
A trill on a short note, such as a crotchet, would be notated like this:



and performed like this:



A trill on a longer note, such as a minim, would be notated with a wavy line like this:



and performed like this:



A **mordent** is an ornament which sounds the main note, followed by the note either a step above or below, then the main note again. The two most common types of mordent are shown in music notation below.

An upper mordent sounds the main note, the note above, and then the main note again.

An upper mordent would be notated like this:



and performed like this:



A lower mordent sounds the main note, the note below, and then the main note again.

A lower mordent would be notated like this (notice the vertical line through the symbol):



and performed like this:



THE HARPSICHORD

A popular keyboard instrument associated with Baroque music is the harpsichord.

Example:

Listen to the *Two-part invention in C major* by J S Bach played on the harpsichord. The first four bars are printed below.



contd



Notice the following features in the music:

- the right hand starts playing on its own
- the left hand part imitates the right hand part, an octave lower in the bass clef
- mordents played by the right hand part in the first two bars
- a descending sequence in both the right and left hand parts in the third and fourth bars

As you listen to more of the piece, notice the contrapuntal (or polyphonic) texture as well as further examples of ornaments, sequences and imitation.

BASSO CONTINUO

As well as playing solo music, the harpsichord was often used to provide an accompaniment for songs and other instrumental pieces. It would have been common practice for the harpsichord player to improvise a chordal accompaniment over a given bass line. This kind of accompaniment is known as a **basso continuo**, sometimes just referred to as **continuo**.

The bass line would generally be played by an instrument such as the cello, double bass or bassoon. The printed music for the bass part would have numbers and music symbols, such as accidentals, printed below the notes. This is known as a *figured bass* and is a form of music notation that would indicate the chords to be played by the harpsichord, much in the same way that keyboard players and guitarists read from printed *guitar chords* today. The harpsichord player would then improvise an appropriate accompaniment using the chords suggested by the *figured bass*.

Here is the opening of the *Sonata in E minor, Opus 5, No. 8* by Arcangelo Corelli, for violin and basso continuo. Notice the solo violin melody on the upper stave, and the bass line on the lower stave with the *figured bass* below the stave.

Here is the same opening, with an example of how the chords might be *realised* on the harpsichord. Notice the solo violin melody is on the upper stave. However, in this example the harpsichord has two staves. The lower staff has the same bass line as before, and this would be played by the performer's left hand. The middle staff has a possible *realisation* of the chords indicated by the *figured bass*, and this would be played by the performer's right hand.

ACTIVITY:

Listen to the *Sonata in E minor, Opus 5, No. 8* by Arcangelo Corelli played by a solo violin accompanied by a harpsichord, with the harpsichord providing the basso continuo part.

THINGS TO DO AND THINK ABOUT

Consider the different types of ornaments you might hear in pieces of music (e.g. mordent, acciaccatura and trill). Make sure that you can tell them apart.

VIDEO LINK

Listen to an example of a harpsichord playing at www.brightredbooks.net

DON'T FORGET

The harpsichord is a popular keyboard instrument in Baroque music.

VIDEO LINK

Find the musical examples for this section on the Digital Zone.

DON'T FORGET

Ornaments such as trills and mordents are common in Baroque music.

DON'T FORGET

A mordent is an ornament which comprises the main note, followed by the note either a step above or below, then the main note again.



ONLINE TEST

Test yourself on Baroque music at www.brightredbooks.net

FORMS, STYLES AND PERIODS

BAROQUE MUSIC 2

THE HARPSICORD

Voice

Thy hand, Be - lin - da; dark - - ness

Basso continuo

shades me, On thy bo - som let me rest;

3♯ 3♭ 9♯ 3♯ 8 7 6 3♯

As well as accompanying solo instruments, the harpsichord is often used to provide the accompaniment for songs and musical ensembles.

Here is the opening of the recitative *Thy hand, Belinda*, from the opera *Dido and Aeneas* by Henry Purcell. Notice the vocal line on the upper staff, and the basso continuo part on the lower staff with the *figured bass* below the staff.

The harpsichord player would create a chordal accompaniment to the voice, elaborating on the chords indicated by the *figured bass*.

ACTIVITY:

Listen to the *Thy hand, Belinda* by Henry Purcell, noting the basso continuo part provided by the harpsichord.

Here is the opening of the *Trio Sonata in D Major, Op. 3, No. 2* by Arcangelo Corelli, for two violins and basso continuo. Notice the 1st violin part on the upper staff, the 2nd violin part on the middle staff, and the basso continuo part on the lower staff with the *figured bass* below the staff. The harpsichord player would play from the basso continuo part and *realise* the *figured bass* by providing a chordal accompaniment.

Violin 1

Violin 2

Basso continuo

6 5 3 6 5 4 6 2 5

DON'T FORGET

The basso continuo is the chordal accompaniment provided by an instrument such as the harpsichord.

ACTIVITY:

Listen to the *Trio Sonata in D Major, Op. 3, No. 2* by Arcangelo Corelli for strings and harpsichord. Listen out for the harpsichord playing the basso continuo part.

THE PIPE ORGAN

Another popular keyboard instrument in Baroque music is the pipe organ. In some performance of Baroque music you may hear an organ providing the basso continuo part instead of a harpsichord.

ACTIVITY:

Listen to the *Trio Sonata in D minor, BWV 527* by J S Bach for two violins, cello and organ.

Listen to the *Organ Partita, BWV 768* by J S Bach for recorder, cello and organ.

However, the organ is also a popular solo instrument in Baroque music.

contd

SAMPLE PAGES – CFE HIGHER MUSIC

Here is an arrangement of the opening from the *Tocatta and Fugue in D minor* by J S Bach:

ACTIVITY:

Listen to the opening bars of the *Tocatta and Fugue in D minor, BWV 565* by J S Bach for organ.

As you listen, notice the following features in the music:

- the first three phrases, in the first line of the music, all start with a lower mordent
- the second line starts with a pedal note – a long held note in the bass, beneath changing harmonies
- the chord built up over this pedal note is a diminished 7th
- the excerpt ends with a Tierce de Picardie – a major chord at the end of a piece of music that's in a minor key.

PASSACAGLIA

A popular form or structure used in Baroque music is the **passacaglia**. The passacaglia is a set of variations on a ground bass with the following characteristics:

- slow tempo
- triple time (3 beats in a bar)
- based on a short 4 or 8 bar phrase
- often in a minor tonality.

The bass line would be repeated many times, while the upper parts would be varied. While the theme in the bass is repeated unchanged the upper parts become increasingly elaborate.

The *Passacaglia in D minor* by Dieterich Buxtehude is based on the following 4-bar theme:

The *Passacaglia in C minor* by J S Bach starts with the following 8-bar theme, played in the bass, which is continuously repeated throughout the music:

THINGS TO DO AND THINK ABOUT

Listen to the *Passacaglia in D minor* by Dieterich Buxtehude.

Listen to the *Passacaglia in C minor* by J. S. Bach.

In each case, listen out for the repeating passacaglia theme in the bass while the harmonies above become increasingly elaborate.



DON'T FORGET

A Tierce de Picardie is a major chord at the end of a piece of music in a minor key.

DON'T FORGET

A Passacaglia is a repeating bass line, usually with 3 beats in the bar and in a minor key.

VIDEO LINK

Find the musical examples for this section on the Digital Zone.

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