

# The Baroque Period: 1600-1750

## POLITICS & SOCIETY: THE MAIN EVENTS

- ★ 1643 -1715: The reign of the 'Sun King', Louis 14th of France. Louis 14th was the longest reigning monarch in European history. Under his rule, there was a great flowering of French culture, especially dance and music.
- ★ 1666: The Fire of London.
- ★ 1618 - 48: Thirty years war in Germany. This was a war between Germany (which was predominantly Catholic) and France (which was Protestant). Germany was eventually defeated.
- ★ 1642-49: English Civil war fought primarily between the monarchists, represented by Charles I, and the Parliamentarians. Charles was finally beheaded. This period was then followed by the Commonwealth and Protectorate in Britain (1649-60), after which the monarchy was restored in 1660.
- ★ This was the period of spice trading - the Dutch and English East India companies established a regular trading partnership with India and the neighboring Maluku - or 'spice islands'.
- ★ The Salem Witch Trials: a dark period in American history, when many women were accused of being witches, and were burnt at the stake.

## SCIENCE & PHILOSOPHY: THE GREAT SCIENTISTS & THINKERS

- ★ Bacon: many works on philosophy & logic
- ★ Descartes: applied rational laws of induction to philosophy
- ★ Galileo: use of telescope for astronomy, laws of falling bodies
- ★ Harvey: discovered circulation of the blood
- ★ Kepler: 3 laws of motion of planets
- ★ Leibnitz: invented the laws of calculus

- ★ Locke: Empiricism, and he also argued against the Divine Right of Kings
- ★ Newton: 3 Laws of Motion
- ★ Pascal: Pascal's theory of geometry, espoused religious doctrine of Jansenism
- ★ Spinoza: religious thinker who espoused Pantheism.

## **GREAT INVENTIONS**

- ★ 1600: First microscope invented by Janssen
- ★ 1670: Minute hands put onto watches
- ★ 1682: Halley's comet first observed
- ★ 1709: Cristofori built the first Fortepiano
- ★ 1714: Gabriel Fahrenheit invented the thermometer
- ★ 1736: Aymand performed first appendectomy

## **ARTISTS & ARCHITECTS**

- ★ Rembrandt: The Raising of Lazarus
- ★ Rubens: The Raising of the Cross
- ★ Tiepolo: Apotheosis of Spain
- ★ Van Dyck: King Charles 1
- ★ Watteau: La Boudeuse
- ★ Wren (architect): St. Paul's Cathedral
- ★ Peak of the Rococo style of architecture which began in France in 1730.

## **LITERATURE: THE MAIN WRITERS**

- ★ Addison: Cato
- ★ de Sade: Justine

- ★ Defoe: Robinson Crusoe
- ★ Dryden: The Indian Queen
- ★ Johnson: Lives of the English Poets.
- ★ Marivaux: Le Paysan Parvenu
- ★ Milton: Paradise Lost
- ★ Pope: The Dunciad
- ★ Swift: Gulliver's Travels
- ★ Voltaire: Candide

## **GENERAL ARTISTIC TRAITS**

The Baroque period is characterised by rather grandiose concepts in painting, architecture, art and music. Baroque architecture often has magnificent effects, contrasts, and ornate designs with an overall theatrical quality. Tiny details are repeated again and again, but often with slight changes, and due attention to contrast. It is this fascination with the theatrical and the idea of imitation with subtle variation, that is the key to the artistic world of the Baroque.

## **BAROQUE MUSIC: AN OVERVIEW**

Baroque music is often described as polyphonic or contrapuntal. Both these terms describe the simultaneous combination of two or more melodies to make harmonious, musical sense. This is unlike later music, where melodic interest is confined to virtually one voice or one part ('homophonic music'), the other parts being merely accompaniment.

In Baroque music it is often hard to say which instrument, which voice or part is the more important - the subject or melody weaves in and out of various voices creating a complex and often quite dense texture. The main theme or subject may be simple or quite ornate - with long and intricate ornaments. Baroque music almost always has a balance and symmetry about it; there is always a sense of control, restraint, and stylish proportion to the great Baroque works.

In Baroque music, unlike later music, there is usually one main 'mood' that prevails

throughout any one piece. This was part of a consciously worked philosophy of the time called the doctrine of affects, or *Affectenlehre*. This doctrine held that certain emotions were affected by specific rhythmic patterns and harmonic progressions. It was thus seen as being emotionally confusing to combine a variety of moods or different rhythmic patterns in the one piece.

Baroque Music: the main composers

- ★ Germany: J.S. Bach, Handel, Pachelbel, Buxtehude, Telemann
- ★ England: Purcell
- ★ Italy: Scarlatti A., Scarlatti D., Corelli, Monteverdi, Vivaldi, Tartini
- ★ France: Lully, Couperin, Rameau

## PERFORMANCE HINTS

Always aim for clarity in bringing out the various parts. There are many rules and traditions regarding effective articulations (legato, non-legato, staccato etc.) which may be employed to highlight the imitative phrases and various motifs that appear throughout a piece. One should always try to bring out the imitation of the main theme or subject that occurs in most Baroque pieces, using a combination of articulation and dynamic shading.

In the Baroque period, a dot after a note often meant that the note was to be lengthened and then immediately followed by a legato break. In music of the French Overture style in particular, the dotted notes were often 'double-dotted'. In France at this time, the tradition was to play any prolonged sequence of equal value notes unevenly rather than as written.

Compared to a modern pianoforte, the octave span on the harpsichord was smaller - the keys were slightly narrower and lighter, and the depth of touch was shallower. This did not encourage the production of dramatic or confronting sounds. It was possible to execute trills and ornaments of all sorts with little effort, and without employing the use of the whole hand and arm. It is this comfortable ease and lack of tension that we need to recreate when playing Baroque music on the piano. The harpsichord was also incapable of creating accents to highlight rhythmic features, and this led to greatly varied use of articulation in Baroque music.

It is crucial to remember that string and wind instruments were often used to accompany many of the Baroque dances which appeared in the dance suites of the time. The articulation employed by these instruments through the use of bowing (strings) and tonguing (woodwind & brass), was often imitated on the harpsichord. As pianists, we can gain some clues regarding Baroque phrasing by considering the natural phrasing of these other instruments (eg. the length of the bow).

Because the harpsichord was incapable of graduated crescendos and decrescendos, the Baroque performer would employ 'block' or terrace dynamics, moving starkly from soft to loud and vice-versa. The question arises as to whether we, as pianists, should follow the same tradition of using block dynamics on our modern pianos, or whether we should maximise the full spectrum of dynamic shading that the piano is capable of. The decision must be left up to the performer, and good musical taste is always the main criterion.

Purists would also insist that the sustaining pedal should not be used when playing Baroque music since the pedal had not yet been invented at that time. If we do decide to use the pedal, then at least we should not allow it to cloud and blur the clarity of voices and the articulations we use throughout the piece.