

The Baroque Era 1600-1750

General Characteristics of the Baroque Era

The term “baroque” comes from the Greek word “baros” meaning “heavy”. Baroque art, architecture, and music are identifiable because of the heavy and elaborate ornamentation and magnificence of proportion and design.



The Baroque era is a time of great change in music:

- Vocal music to instrumental music
 - Instrumental music becomes as important as vocal music. By the end of the era, it's even more important. By 1750 very little acappella music is being written at all.
- Sacred music to secular music
 - More music is now reaching more people.
- Polyphonic texture to homophonic texture
 - In previous times, polyphony was the dominant texture. That is now gradually replaced by a **new system of harmony based on chords and progressions accompanying a melody which we call homophony**. By 1750 music is mostly homophonic with many large polyphonic sections. Demonstration of how Polyphony works. [Bach "Little" Fugue](#)
Demonstration of Homophony. [Bleak Midwinter](#)
- Opera becomes the most popular form of entertainment.

Music of the Baroque era:

- Denotes a style of elegance
- Feelings of pomp and grandeur, energy and emotion
- Heavy with elaboration and ornamentation (twists and turns)
- Terraced Dynamics (a Baroque specific dynamic effect)
- Highly ornate, embellished melodic lines
- Continuous, “busy” melodies
- Full counterpoint
- Maintains one mood throughout a movement
- Maintains one steady tempo throughout a movement
- No standard instrumentation in the orchestra (strings and whatever else you can find)
- Terraced Dynamics
- Harpsichord (continuo) as the backbone of Baroque music
- Organ as the great solo instrument (King of Instruments)



Most Popular Instruments of the Baroque era:

- Keyboard Instruments
 - Pipe Organ – Huge complex instrument which creates its sound by forcing air through pipes of different sizes. Used in church, many times incorporated into the design of the building.
 - Harpsichord – A coffin shaped instrument with a small sound because the strings are plucked. The use of this instrument is a tell tale sign of Baroque music. Used in concert halls.
 - Clavichord – (not previously discussed) a smaller keyboard instrument used extensively in peoples' homes. The keys cause small pieces of metal (tangent) press against the string giving a soft sound. Not normally used for ensemble playing.



- String Instruments
 - Violin
 - Viola
 - Cello
 - String Orchestras
- Wind Instruments (Brass and Woodwind)
 - Trumpet
 - Oboe
 - Flute
 - Recorder – Popular Baroque instrument which fell out of use after the Baroque era. No longer a member of the modern day orchestra like other wind instruments. It has found new life as a teaching instrument for school children.
- Folk Instruments
 - Lute
 - Guitar

DEFINITIONS

Chorale – a homophonic hymn intended to be sung during the church service by the congregation and accompanied normally accompanied by organ. [All People That On Earth Do Dwell](#)

Embellish – to make beautiful by means of ornamentation or decoration.

Homophony (homophonic texture) – a harmonic concept which includes a melodic line of primary interest which is accompanied by harmony of secondary interest. The harmony is based upon chords and chord progressions. Sometimes described as a vertical approach to harmony. [YouTube Homophony Explanation](#)

Polyphony (polyphonic texture) – A harmonic concept where each voice part is assigned a “melody” of equal interest and importance. Often described as giving a horizontal flow to the harmony. [YouTube Polyphony Explanation](#)