

LESSON 14

THE FOUR PERIODS OF MUSIC HISTORY

THE BAROQUE PERIOD

There are four periods of music history:

Baroque:	1600-1750
Classical:	1750-1830
Romantic:	1830-1900
20th & 21st Centuries:	1900-present

(Currently, there is not a definitive name for stylistic periods of the 20th and 21st Centuries. It is sometimes called the "Contemporary Period," "Modern" or "Post-Common Practice." It may also be divided into two groups: the 20th Century (1900-1999), and the Contemporary Period (2000-Present).

Music of the **BAROQUE PERIOD** (1600-1750) is characterized by the following:

- a. **Polyphonic Texture**: Two or more separate voices are interchanged to create the music. The melodies are passed between the parts, and the parts are of equal importance.
- b. **Use of Ornamentation**: Composers included many trills, mordents, and other ornaments in their music. It was the performer's responsibility to know how to play the ornaments correctly. Performers could also add their own ornaments at appropriate places in the music.
- c. **Improvisation**: Not only did music of the Baroque Period contain many ornaments, the performer was also free to improvise sections of the music. This not only included adding the ornaments mentioned above, but also playing **cadenzas**, an entire section of music that the performer created, often after a cadence in the music.

Another type of improvisation in Baroque music included the use of **figured bass**. From an outline of the chord progression of a composition, the performer improvised, using the harmonies specified by the figured bass. In the example below, the performer saw the bass clef and the figured bass directly under the music. The performer played the chords identified by the Roman numerals.



Performer plays: I V vi iii IV I IV ii⁶ I⁴ V⁷ I)

Answer these questions.

1. Most keyboard music of the Baroque Period was written for which three instruments?

harpichord, clavicord, organ

2. Describe two types of improvisation used in Baroque music.

play Cadenza
use figured bass

3. What type of ornamentation was used in Baroque music?

trills, mordents

4. What texture is common in music of the Baroque Period?

Polyphonic

5. Why were terraced dynamics used in Baroque music?

because the harpsichord was not able to make crescendos and diminuendos.

6. Name four Baroque composers and their birthplaces.

J.S. Bach - Germany

G.F. Handel - Germany

Domenico Scarlatti - Italy

Henry Purcell - England