

Baroque week!

Fast facts:

Timeline: 1600-1750

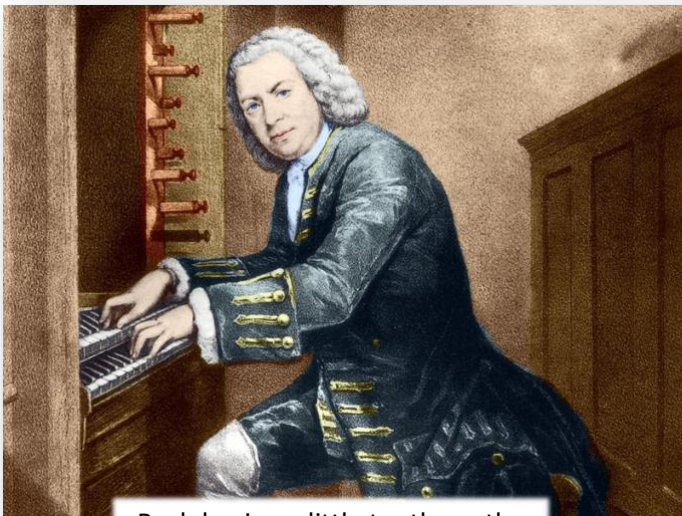
Famous composers: Bach, Handel, Vivaldi

Instruments: Oboe, bassoon, natural trumpet, natural horn, sackbut (baroque trombones), violin, cello, bass, recorder, viola, viola da gamba, harpsichord

Baroque music was a huge step forward in music history, because with it came the beginning of modern harmony and the development of the *harpsichord*, which is basically the grandpa of the piano. Have you ever looked inside a piano? It works by having small hammers that hit the strings when you press the keys. The harpsichord, however, worked by the strings being plucked instead of hit, and so it sounds quite different! Have a watch of this video and see if you can hear what I mean -

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XcsfDxoidV8>

As you saw there, it was pretty common for the role of the conductor to be taken by the harpsichord player, whether they were the soloist or not. If they weren't playing the solo role, they would play chords and add *ornaments* to them so that they could help fill out the harmony. This, along with other bass instruments in the orchestra such as cello, bassoon and double bass, would be a collective group referred to as *basso continuo* (continuous bass). This was an essential part of the baroque orchestra, and featured in three new and exciting forms of composition - *concertos* (soloist and orchestra), *opera* and *choral works with orchestra*. Choral works were a huge part of baroque music because Religious Institutions such as Churches (which had resident choirs) were the only places that had any



Bach having a little tootle on the organ

money to pay composers to write music. In fact, Bach worked for almost his entire life as an *organist* and composer for various churches in Germany. One of his most famous works is his Mass in B minor - have a listen here (skip to 19.43 for some natural trumpet fun)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3FLbiDrn8IE&t=11s>

Baroque *concertos* were very popular, and were a bit different from the concertos you may have seen being performed today. In authentic Baroque performances, the soloist comes out of the ensemble to play their solo part and then afterwards goes back. This developed into concerto performances we have now where the soloist is out in front of the ensemble the whole time! In terms of writing Baroque concertos, few composers are better known than Vivaldi (he wrote over 500 concertos in his life!). You've probably heard of his piece "The Four Seasons" before. It's hugely popular, and for good reason! It uses the violin as a solo instrument in a series of concertos describing spring, summer, autumn and winter. If you've heard any of these pieces being performed it was probably spring, but my personal favourite is winter...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZPdk5GalDjo>



Vivaldi having a little noodle on the cello, much to the delight of his adoring lady fans

As you may have noticed by now, the harmonies in the Baroque era weren't too complicated but they were very well constructed and easy to listen to. Ornamentation was also an important feature of baroque performance, and is basically like a little decoration people could put into the music to make it more interesting and personal.

If you've enjoyed reading this and would like to learn more about the baroque era, you can go and watch these two videos here

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i6PoY7hGv3E> part one

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PKcNyKw2n98> part two