

Music of the Baroque Period:  
How its Styles and Techniques Changed Music  
Honors Thesis  
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## Table of Contents

<b>Table of Contents</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Abstract</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>A Brief History</b>	<b>4</b>
Doctrine of Affections	<b>5</b>
Musical Style	<b>6</b>
Baroque Dance	<b>7</b>
Baroque String Instruments	<b>7</b>
Baroque Composers	<b>8</b>
<b>Arcangelo Corelli</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>La Folia</b>	<b>9</b>
Suzuki	<b>10</b>
<b>Process of Preparing Piece</b>	<b>10</b>
How I Chose the Piece	<b>10</b>
How I prepared the Piece	<b>11</b>
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Appendix A</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Appendix B</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Appendix C</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Appendix D</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Appendix E</b>	<b>18</b>

**Abstract**

This paper explores the music of the Baroque era and how its unique traits made it diverge from the music that preceded it, as well as pave the way for music styles to come. The Baroque period, which is generally agreed to range from around 1600 to 1750, was a time of great advancement not only in arts and sciences, but in music as well. The overabundance of ornamentation sprinkled throughout the pieces composed in this era is an attribute that was uncommon in the past, and helped distinguish the Baroque style of music. A composer of the Baroque period that this paper will analyze in greater depth is Arcangelo Corelli. Corelli's contributions to the Baroque music style have impacted how the violin is perceived and played to this day.

*Keywords:* Music, Baroque, Corelli

### **Introduction**

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines baroque as, “having the characteristics of a style of artistic expression prevalent especially in the 17th century that is marked generally by use of complex forms, bold ornamentation, and the juxtaposition of contrasting elements often conveying a sense of drama, movement, and tension” (Baroque, n.d.). Although the true origin of the term is still disputed, two major theories prevail: the Italian word *Baroco*, a farfetched mode of argumentation by syllogism or the Spanish word *Barueco*, meaning an oddly shaped pearl (Palisca, 1968). The music that came out of the Baroque era is undoubtedly beautiful, as is a pearl, but its style was new and innovative for the time, which made people unsure how to react to such a stylistic change. The Italian composer and violinist, Arcangelo Corelli, was a pioneer of his time by developing techniques to make music, and more specifically music for the violin, more idiomatic to the instrument.

### **A Brief History**

Around the year 1600 was when the Renaissance period began to transition to the Baroque period through stylistic changes in music and art. Appendix A shows the timeline of music eras throughout western history. Even though in current times Baroque music is regarded as highly elegant, such an ideology was not always the case. In fact, the Baroque music style was, “taken to be a degenerate form of the renaissance” (Bukofzer, 1947, p.1). Comparatively, the music of the Baroque period seemed too overstated and exaggerated, because of the excessive use of ornamentation. Some of the comparisons between Baroque and Renaissance music styles can be viewed in Appendix B. The Baroque style originated in Italy and, from there, was able to spread throughout Europe and eventually to the rest of the world. In addition to

Italy's birth of Baroque music, France and Germany were also significant influencers era (What is Baroque Music?, n.d).

### **Doctrines of the Affections**

It is strange to think that there was a time when music and emotions were not considered to be directly related. However, prior to the Baroque period this was the case. An affection is considered to be a spiritual movement/ or operation of the mind in which it is attracted or repelled by an object it has come to know (Palisca, 1968). These affections were originally thought to be a result of an imbalance of spirits and vapors that continuously flow throughout the body (Palisca, 1968). When these affections move, a state of imbalance is attained, which *is* the affection (Palisca, 1968). The terms affection and passion are both descriptions of the same process, just from different point of views: the body and mind respectively. "The alteration of the blood and spirits affect the body, while the mind passively suffers the disturbance" (Palisca, 1968). The Doctrine of the Affections, also referred to as the Doctrine of Affects, is a theory that came to be favorably received by Baroque composers and theorists (Britannica, 2014). This theory stated that a composer was indeed able to compose a piece of music that was capable of causing his audience to experience an involuntary emotional response. Furthermore, during the Baroque period, the principal objective of music and other art forms was to incite the affections and to move the audience emotionally (Palisca, 1968). The common characteristic that can be seen throughout as the underlying theme in Baroque era music is the expression of emotions and playing with the listener's feelings.

## Musical Style

In Baroque music, it was common for composers to write in his score a basic outline of what he wanted the piece to be, not specifically every note. Much of the style was dependent on how the performer interpreted the piece, rather than following detailed instructions in the score. This interpretation was not only limited to notes written on the page, but as well as articulation, dynamics, ornamentation, and even some rhythms. In modern times, it is customary for a composer to dictate exactly how he wants his piece to be performed, specifying every wish on the score itself. Consequently, Baroque musicians were expected to add ornaments such as trills, grace notes, and vibrato at their own discretion. A common structure of a Baroque piece is to state a theme, but then reiterate it and alter it multiple times throughout the duration of the piece. It should be known by the performer that the first statement of the theme should be played *forte*, but then the immediate repetition of it should be played in the opposing dynamic, *piano*. These changes in dynamics are often abrupt, suddenly getting soft or loud, and not usually a gradual change. Eighteenth century philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau defines Baroque as, “rough music ... that the whole harmony is confused, filled with modulations and dissonances, its notes hard and unnatural, the intonation difficult, and the movement constrained” (1779, p. 30). His negative perception to this style is attributed to the continual alteration of the piece’s main theme including the addition of a variety of ornamentation. Similarly, articulation markings on notes were not always specified as to exactly which notes they applied to, but it was up to the performer to know that if the first measure of a theme variation had specified articulation, it should be carried through the entire section.

### **Baroque Dance**

Many of the pieces composed during the Baroque period were financed by wealthy members of society such as cardinals, kings or queens. They would pay composers to produce music for them and play it at their parties and gatherings. A major activity of these parties was dance, and therefore the compositions had to be favorable to Baroque dance styles. King Louis XIV of France was a huge supporter of the arts and was a great contributor to the development of the Baroque dance style. He reigned from 1654 to 1715, but the Palace of Versailles was not officially in use until 1682 (Louis XIV, 2019). At this palace, he constantly had parties with other individuals of noble status. These social dances of Noble Style were a sign of wealth and status. As shown in Appendix C, King Louis XIV is posing with his legs exposed in order to reveal his muscular calves (King Louis XIV, 2019). King Louis was a ballet dancer and is known to have greatly amplified the ballet dance style. Appendix C is a portrait of King Louis XIV, where he emphasizes his muscular calves he obtained from his frequent dancing. Since King Louis was such a supporter of the arts, investing a great deal of time and resource into advancing art and music, he must be credited with much of the development of Baroque era arts.

### **Baroque String Instruments**

The instruments of the Baroque period were different from what we know instruments to look like today. The Baroque period served as a transitional time period for instruments, there were even some instruments that were used at the beginning of the era but had fallen out of use by the end of the era. Some examples of instruments that are no longer being used are the viola de gamba, recorders, and harpsichords (Harpsichord, n.d.). The harpsichord was the precursor to modern day pianos; they have similar looks and purposes but very different sounds. Pianos are considered percussion because of the tiny mallets that hit the strings to make the notes resonate,

but with the harpsichord there are tiny mechanisms that pluck the strings to make the notes ring out. As can be viewed in Appendix D, harpsichords similar features to the modern-day piano. Another difference between Baroque and modern instruments is the bows. Baroque bows for stringed instruments were smaller, had a more pointed tip, and have more of an outward curve. Additionally, the way of tightening the hairs is different: baroque bows have a clip technique where the bottom end of the hairs are attached to a piece of wood which gets clipped onto the bow itself using a variety of different notches depending on desired tension, whereas modern bows have a simple tightening mechanism. “Because baroque and modern bows are structurally different, for example, string players using modern bows often use a gentler attack on the string and crescendos and diminuendos on longer notes” (What is Baroque Music?, n.d). With that being said, the different curvature of the bow caused more of a crescendo at either end of the bow, with a slight diminuendo at the center.

### **Baroque Composers**

One of the most famous composers to come out of the Baroque period was Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750) (Top 10 Baroque Composers, 2019). The Baroque period is even said to come to an end after his death in 1750. The next most well known composer from the era is Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741) (Top 10 Baroque Composers, 2019). Most people have heard of Vivaldi before, with his most renowned work being his *Four Seasons*. Next is George Friedrich Händel (1685-1759) with his *Messiah* and Domenico Scarlatti (1685-1757) with his various sonatas (Top 10 Baroque Composers, 2019). Founding the modern form of orchestra playing as well as Baroque trio/ solo sonata and the *concerto grosso*, Arcangelo Corelli (1653-1713) left his impact on Baroque music (Top 10 Baroque Composers, 2019). Although there were many more

composers that helped shape the Baroque period as we know it today, these are just a few of the most well-known individuals.

### **Arcangelo Corelli**

A composer that greatly influenced the Baroque music style, as well as violin techniques, was Arcangelo Corelli. Born in February of 1653, Corelli was both a composer and a musician, with the violin being his main instrument (Corelli, Arcangelo, 1954). Little is known about his early life, but around the year 1685 Corelli became good friends with Cardinal Pietro Ottoboni (Corelli, Arcangelo, 1954). Corelli lived in the palace of the cardinal where he would assist with highly regarded weekly concerts (Corelli, Arcangelo, 1954). Corelli is credited with being the first to organize the basic elements of violin techniques, the one to popularize the Concerto Grosso form, as well as orchestral chamber sonatas (Corelli, nd). Pupils came from all over to seek Corelli's teachings, broadening the horizon of his fame (Corelli, Arcangelo, 1954). Despite his fame and popularity, Corelli only published a few pieces of his own (Corelli, Arcangelo, 1954). He passed away in January of 1713, leaving behind his imprint on Baroque music.

### **La Folia**

One of Corelli's pieces that he composed was *La Folia*, which is a form of dance. This dance style is not exclusive to the Baroque period, but has been around long before (Folia, 2001). The folia form has transformed and adapted through time, taking the shape of the culture and techniques of the time (Folia, 2001). The folia form is in three, with a repeated ground bass line. The earliest composed example of a Folia was attributed to Jean-Baptiste Lully, and his structure was popular in France and England throughout the Baroque period (Folia, 2001). The baroque renditions of folia music have a similar feel, as can be heard when comparing Corelli's *La Folia* with that of Vivaldi. A visual of the *La Folia* piece by Corelli can be seen through Appendix E.

## **Suzuki**

Although the chosen piece *La Folia* was written by Corelli, the version I practiced and performed was arranged by a man by the name of Sinichi Suzuki. Suzuki was not only a violinist, but also a philosopher and educator (Suzuki, 1998). He was born in 1898 in Japan where he studied the violin (Suzuki, 1998). He created a style of instrument learning targeted to help children be successful at playing music (Suzuki, 1998). Suzuki compiled arrangements of pieces in which he ranked them based on difficulty in order for students to progress with their learning of music. Corelli's *La Folia* was one of the pieces that Suzuki chose to arrange and use as a part of his repertoire.

## **Process of Preparing Piece**

### **How I Chose the Piece**

Although music is not my major, music has been a part of me for as long as I can remember. I have been playing the violin in an orchestra since I was in third grade and haven't stopped from grade school up to college. I had originally planned on taking up a music minor in order to enhance my understanding of music, but time did not allow it. I was still able to take a few additional music courses and was thrilled when I heard I was able to do my Honors Thesis on something music related. Since the first time I had played a Corelli piece I was amazed by his style and how he was able to create musical dialogue between different instrument sections in an orchestra. Upon conferring with my advisor, I learned that he also had a solo piece, *La Folia*, and I knew instantly that I wanted to perform that as a supplement to my thesis. With Corelli's music belonging to the Baroque era, I came to the conclusion that I would research the era as a whole and Corelli's contributions to how we view music today.

### **How I Prepared the Piece**

In order to prepare for the performance of the piece, I worked with my thesis advisor for at least an hour a week every week for the entire semester. We broke the piece up into sections and would focus on different sections each time we met. Sometimes we would go over special techniques that would help me with specific sections of the piece such as scale exercises or double stop practices. It was also a good time to just talk about what I came across in my research and synthesize all of the aspects of what I discovered into how to perform the piece in a way that reflected the Baroque era. Once I learned the piece and was comfortable enough to play it fully through, the next obstacle was to have the violin part fit with the accompaniment part.

### **Conclusion**

There is no doubt that the Baroque era greatly impacted music that was to come. Its heavily ornamented style was radical at the time, but since has become more widely accepted. More specifically, Corelli had such a huge impact on music stylistically. He is credited with founding or popularizing a few different musical forms. He is even thought to be one of the first to use chords in violin playing. All in all, the Baroque era paved the way for future music with its distinctive techniques and emotional appeal to the audiences.

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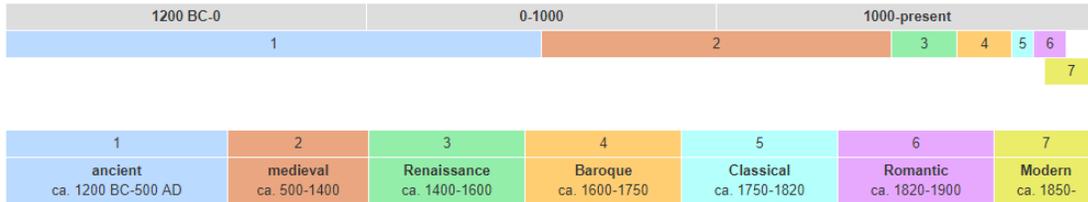
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## Appendix A Western Music Timeline

### Western Music Timeline

[cite]

#### AGES OF WESTERN MUSIC



#### SUMMARY OF WESTERN MUSIC

<b>Greek and Roman (ca. 1200 BC-500 AD)</b> • monophonic, mode-based music • basic music theory		<b>Early Christian (ca. 200-500)</b> • adaptation of Roman melodies to chant	
<b>Dark Ages (ca. 500-1000)</b> • Gregorian chant • crude notation (approximate indication of pitch)		<b>later medieval/Renaissance (ca. 1000-1600)</b> • polyphonic vocal (sacred and secular) • staff notation (precise indication of pitch and rhythm)	
<b>Baroque (ca. 1600-1750)</b> • Vivaldi • Handel • Bach		<b>Romantic (ca. 1820-1900)</b> • full Romantic: Berlioz, Chopin, Liszt, R Strauss • conservative Romantic: Schubert, Mendelssohn, Schumann, Brahms • regional Romantic: Russia, Bohemia, Scandinavia	
<b>Classical (ca. 1750-1820)</b> • Haydn • Mozart • Beethoven		<b>Modern (ca. 1850-present)</b> • Early Modern: Debussy (impressionism) • Late Modern: Ravel (impressionism), Schoenberg (radical modern), Stravinsky (moderate modern)	

<http://www.essential-humanities.net/art-overview/western-music-timeline/>

**Appendix B**

## Renaissance vs. Baroque Comparison

<b>Renaissance</b>	<b>Baroque</b>
One Practice, One Style	Two Practices, Three Styles
Restrained Representation of the words, musica reservata and madrigalism	Affective representation of the words, textual absorption
All voices equally balanced	Polarity of the outermost voices
Diatonic melody in small range	Diatonic and chromatic melody in wide range
Modal Counterpoint	Tonal Counterpoint
Intervallic harmony and intervallic dissonance treatment	Chordal harmony and chordal dissonance treatment
Chords are by-products of the part writing	Chords are self-contained entities
Chord progressions are governed by modality	Chord progressions are governed by tonality
Evenly flowing rhythm regulated by the tactus	Extremes of rhythm, free declamation and mechanical pulsations
No pronounced idioms, voice and instrument are interchangeable	Vocal and instrumental idioms, the idioms are interchangeable

**APPENDIX C**

King Louis XIV



<https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/monarchy-enlightenment/baroque-art1/france/a/rigaud-louis-xiv>

**APPENDIX D**

Harpsichord



<https://music.ubc.ca/blog/tag/harpsichord>

APPENDIX E

*La Folia*

62

*Follia*

*Adagio*

*Allegro*

The image displays a page of handwritten musical notation for the piece 'Follia' by Domenico Scarlatti. The page is numbered '62' in the top left corner. The score is written for a single melodic line on a treble clef staff and a basso continuo line on a bass clef staff. The piece is divided into two distinct sections: an 'Adagio' section and an 'Allegro' section. The 'Adagio' section begins with a tempo marking and features a series of chords and intervals, with some notes marked with 'x' above them. The 'Allegro' section follows, characterized by a faster tempo and more complex rhythmic patterns, including triplets and sixteenth-note runs. The notation includes various musical symbols such as clefs, time signatures, and dynamic markings.