

AGENDA: SEPTEMBER 10

- 1 Introduction to the Early Baroque Era
- 2 Invention of Opera
- 3 Monteverdi's *The Coronation of Poppea*
- 4 Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*

1

THE BAROQUE ERA: 1600–1750

Early Baroque: 1600–1700 (Monteverdi, Purcell)

Late or High Baroque: 1700–1750 (Bach, Handel, Vivaldi)

Why 1600?

- changing tastes in vocal music: homophony, recitative style
- the invention of opera by the Florentine Camarata

Why 1750?

- rising popularity of a simpler style (the *galant* style)
- death of Bach (1750)
- death of Handel (1759)

2

CONTEXT: MUSIC FOR THE ARISTOCRACY

- ✦ most countries/regions in Europe were ruled by kings
- ✦ people believed that kings ruled by divine right
- ✦ kings and other aristocrats were the most important patrons
- ✦ music was composed to glorify their rule, enforce their will as law, and maintain social order
- ✦ political function to impress and intimidate explains many features of Baroque music
 - extravagant ornamentation
 - virtuosic; showcasing immense skill
 - grandiose; larger-than-life scale
 - highly expressive yet also highly organized
 - operas about magnanimous rulers (e.g., *La clemenza di Tito*) 3

CONTEXT: MUSIC & RATIONALISM

Rise of Empirical Science

Galileo Galilei (astronomer)

Kepler (mathematician-astronomer)

Descartes (philosopher-mathematician): wrote a treatise theorizing and codifying the emotions

- ✦ developments in instrument manufacture and tuning
- ✦ systemization of virtually all facets of music composition
 - rules for how to compose harmony
 - rules for how to represent different emotions in music
- ✦ importance of adhering to a formal plan

CONTEXT: MUSIC & THE EMOTIONS

- ✦ *humanism* continued to flourish in the Baroque
 - a philosophy that emphasizes the value and agency of human beings over divine will or the supernatural
- ✦ interest in music's powers to express emotions
- ✦ Baroque opera arias are classified by what emotion or *affect* it exemplifies (e.g., a lament, a rage aria, etc.)
- ✦ instrumental music was composed according to theories of what keys, melodies, and rhythmic patterns represented what emotions

5

STYLE MARKERS OF BAROQUE MUSIC

Harmony

- ✦ composers restricted themselves to major and minor modes
- ✦ development of *functional harmony*: rules governing how chords are strung together
- ✦ steady *harmonic rhythm* (rate at which chords change)
- ✦ bass line assumes greater importance

Basso Continuo

- sustaining instrument (cello or bassoon) plays bass line
- a chordal instrument (harpsichord, lute) plays chords
- since organs can sustain, they can play both roles
- the composer didn't write out all the notes of the chords;
there many different ways to "realize" a continuo part

6

STYLE MARKERS OF BAROQUE MUSIC

Melody

- + complicated, ornate melodies
- + performers were expected to *improvise* additional *ornamentation*

Rhythm & Metre

- + strong beat and regular metre
- + influenced by dance—repetitive rhythmic patterns

Dynamics

- + dynamic markings appear for the first time in music history

Timbre

- + composers often did not specify what instruments they wanted
- + composers got more particular in the Late Baroque

7

OPERA—DEFINITION

a form of theatre in which characters sing instead of speak.

High-Tech Multimedia Artform

- music
- drama
- poetry (the aria texts; the recit was prose)
- scenic design: elaborate painted sets, costumes, special effects (e.g., cloud machines; wave machines)
- dance (French opera)

8

OPERA—ORIGINS

The Florentine Camarata

- ✦ a group (called an *academy*) of male aristocrats who got together to talk about Greek philosophy and culture
- ✦ Plato and Aristotle believed that music could represent the character and emotions of humans, and by so doing arouse emotions in listeners and affect their moral character
- ✦ the Camarata wanted to re-create ancient Greek drama, believed to be sung not spoken
- ✦ they didn't know what Greek music sounded like
- ✦ they knew it was *monophonic* not *polyphonic*

9

OPERA—ORIGINS

The Camarata's Aesthetic Program

- ✦ solo singing with accompaniment
- ✦ music needed to represent emotions
- ✦ Renaissance madrigalists had similar aims but different means: they represented the *text* by word painting
- ✦ the Camarata recommended that composers represent the *emotions* in the text by imitating how someone feeling that emotion would express themselves
- ✦ singing modelled on the rhythms and inflections of speech

10

OPERA—PRIVATE VS. PUBLIC

Private/Court Opera—Opera for the Elite

- ✦ first operas were performed at private parties (usually weddings) and other gatherings of aristocrats
e.g., Monteverdi's *Orfeo*, performed for an *academy*
- ✦ French opera was performed at the court of Louis XIV

Public Opera—Opera for Everyone

- ✦ first public opera house was opened in Venice in 1637
e.g., *The Coronation of Poppea* was premiered there
- ✦ Venice was a major centre of trade and tourism
- ✦ many operas, like *Poppea*, were premiered in carnival season

11

OPERA—PRIVATE VS. PUBLIC

	<u>Private/Court</u>	<u>Public</u>
Who paid for it?	The King or an Aristocrat	The people who attend
Who could attend?	Aristocrats	Anyone with money
Where?	Their palaces/courts (fairly small venue)	Larger but less lavish public theatres
Primary Function:	To glorify themselves and their court	To make money and entertain people

12

OPERA—PRIVATE VS. PUBLIC

Private/Court

- lofty subjects: Greek mythology; moral allegories
- characters: gods/goddesses
- tone: serious
- focus: story, spectacle
- lavish sets and costumes
- large orchestra (strings, winds, brass, and continuo)
- virtuosity is vulgar
- recitative speckled with arias
- fixed text

Public

- baser subject matter: sex, social climbing, backstabbing
- characters: mortals
- tone: serious mixed with comic
- focus: opera divas
- less funds for spectacle
- small orchestra (strings and continuo)
- virtuosity is *de rigueur*
- arias connected with recitative
- continually revised for revivals

13

OPERA—CASTRATI & CROSSDRESSING

- ✦ high voices = heroism, power, sexual potency
- ✦ the leading man was always a castrato or a woman in drag
- ✦ people didn't care if the performer was the right gender

Castrato: a man castrated before reaching puberty so his voice wouldn't change

- began in 16th c. Italian churches where women couldn't sing
- castrati were fixtures of operatic stages in Italy until the 19th c.
- castrati were the pop stars of their day
- last castrati died in the early 20th c.
- castrato roles now played by mezzo sopranos or countertenors

Countertenor: a male singer specializing in performing *falsetto*

14

MONTEVERDI

When? – late 16th c. – mid. 17th c.

Where? – Italy, specifically Mantua and Venice

What? – madrigal (secular polyphony in Italian), opera

- ✦ began his career composing madrigals
- ✦ composed first great opera, *Orfeo*, for the Duke of Mantua
- ✦ choirmaster at St. Mark's cathedral in Venice
- ✦ in retirement, composed operas for the Venice opera house

“Make the words the mistress of the music and not the servant.”

– Monteverdi

15

THE CORONATION OF POPPEA

- ✦ premiered during carnival season
- ✦ follows the Prologue & 3 Acts plan that was now standard
- ✦ Prologue for allegorical characters (Fortune, Virtue, Cupid) was common at this time
- ✦ juxtaposition of serious and comic: something for everyone
- ✦ the good die; the adulterers get married and rule the empire

“*Orfeo*, the court pageant, celebrated established order and authority [...] *Poppea*, the carnival show, brings it all down: passion wins out over reason, woman over man, guile over truth, impulse over wisdom, license over law, artifice [...] over nature.”

– musicologist Richard Taruskin

16

THE CORONATION OF POPPEA, Act I Scene 3

Recit – Arioso – Recit

- Poppea as seductress: repetitions of “Tournerai?”
- she is successful: Nero is desperate to please Poppea
- sexual desire: languorous exchanges of “addio”; breathless repetitions of their names; improvised ornaments

Aria

- Poppea’s mood abruptly changes to jubilant
- sec. 1 – lingering doubt represented through minor mode
lapse into recit for uncertain last phrase
- sec. 2 – growing confidence represented in rhythmic insistence
- sec. 3 – fighting spirit in rhythms; optimism in major key

17

RECITATIVE

speech-like connective tissue between arias

dramatic function: advance the plot

- prose text
- often a conversation between multiple characters
- *syllabic* text setting (one note per syllable)
- *declamatory*: rhythm & melody follow the patterns of speech
- melody is not very tuneful; vague and wandering
- metre is ill-defined
- formless—follows the text and dramatic action
- continuo accompaniment; non-interesting: sustained chords with periodic interjections between words

18

ARIA

a solo song for a single character

dramatic function: express the character's emotion

musical function: showcase the singer's vocal prowess

- poetic text set with lots of textual repetition
- *lyrical* (tuneful)
- *melismatic* text setting (many notes per syllable)
- clear beat; consistent metre
- clearly-defined formal structure
- finely-wrought accompaniment: (usually) full orchestra
- singers improvise extra flourishes: *ornamentation*

Arioso: middle-ground between aria and recit, typically short 19

THE CORONATION OF POPPEA, Final Duet

It was typical to end an opera with a duet for the main lovers.

Eroticism

- voices are singing in the same range
- voices writhing, intertwining with increasing agitation!
- dissonances and resolutions represent sexual tension and release (remember *Tristan*?)
- at the end, they join on a single pitch

PURCELL

When? – late 17th c.

Where? – England, specifically London

What? – sacred vocal music, theatre music, instrumental music

- ✦ organist at Westminster Abbey
- ✦ member of the Chapel Royal (King's personal musicians)
- ✦ influenced by French and Italian music
- ✦ one of the first masters of vocal music in English
- ✦ wrote the first English opera, *Dido and Aeneas*

21

DIDO AND AENEAS

- ✦ performed at a girls' boarding school
- ✦ probably premiered in court during James II's reign
- ✦ librettist referred to an allegorical reading:
Aeneas = James II; witches = Catholic Church; Dido = Britain
- ✦ based on Virgil's *The Aeneid*
- ✦ Italian influences: singing style; descending chromatic ground bass for laments was a cliché of Venetian opera
- ✦ atypical of Italian opera at this time: no virtuosic singing
- ✦ French influences: choruses, dances, and orchestral pieces

22

DIDO AND AENEAS, Act III Scene 2

Recit

→ word painting on “darkness”: chromatic *melisma*

Dido’s Lament, “When I am laid in earth”

→ “sighing” vocal gestures (e.g., “no trouble”)

→ 5-bar *ground bass* (repeating bass line); highly chromatic

→ since the bass repeats, so do the harmonies

→ *lament* was a common aria type for female characters

Chorus, “With Drooping Wings”

→ madrigal style: mostly polyphonic; last line homophonic

→ word painting—e.g., “drooping” with descending lines

→ functional harmony and more definite rhythms

23

BEFORE NEXT CLASS ...

✦ read pages 110–119 and 130–138

✦ listen to

Bach, *Well-Tempered Clavier* Book 1, Prelude & Fugue in C+

Rameau, Minuet & Tambourin from *Castor et Pollux*

24