

Chapter 11: The Mid-Eighteenth-Century: From Bach's Sons to the Comic Style

I. Introduction

A. Mid-eighteenth-century style

1. The mid-eighteenth century is associated with a variety of styles: rococo, *style galant*, and *empfindsamer Stil* (sensitivity style).
2. In the late eighteenth century, the sons of J. S. Bach were considered major contributors to the formation of Classical style.
3. The nineteenth-century revival of music by J. S. Bach, combined with the continued celebration of Handel's music, contributed to an alternative view of the eighteenth century.

II. Forefather to the new style: Domenico Scarlatti

A. Domenico Scarlatti (1685–1757) was groomed for a career in music as the son of Alessandro Scarlatti. His first opera was produced in 1703 at the age of seventeen.

1. He invented what amounted to a new style of composition, with a commitment to delighting rather than instructing the listener.
 - a) He became the great miniaturist of his age, dedicating the last four decades of his life, after retiring from opera composition, to 555 short, freestanding compositions for the harpsicord called sonatas.

III. Bach's sons

A. The music of Wilhelm Friedemann Bach

1. J. S. Bach's eldest son, Wilhelm Friedemann, composed in a style quite unlike that of his father.
 - a) Harmonic rhythm
 - b) Melodies that demonstrate balance and contrast
 - c) Preordained harmonic plan
 - d) Periodic phrasing

B. C. P. E. Bach's expressive music

1. This style, linked with terms such as "sensitivity," is known as *Empfindsamkeit*.
 - a) The artist attempted to capture the sentiments of real people.
 - b) The composer most associated with *empfindsamer Stil* is C. P. E. Bach.
 - (1) Fantasia in C Minor
 - (i) Instrumental recitative
 - (ii) Clavichord
 - (2) A fantasia might be characterized as a transcribed improvisation.
 - c) C. P. E.'s Fantasia in C Minor asks the performer to imitate vocal idioms, without having any text.
 - d) C. P. E. intended to transcend the need for text to guide the artist.
 - (1) He thought instrumental music particularly suited to this aim because of the variety of expression available to the medium.
 - (2) He was an early proponent of the argument for absolute music.

- e) By the mid-eighteenth century, operatic style adopted the possibilities of expression inherent in recitative, taking opera back to the sound of the early seventeenth century.

C. The London Bach: Johann Christian

1. The music of Johann Christian Bach provides an opportunity to see how opera impacted instrumental music.
2. A student of C. P. E., J. C.'s career more closely resembled that of Handel than J. S.
 - a) He traveled to Italy to study.
 - b) He then went to London.
3. J. C. composed domestic music for the London market and formed London's most successful concert series with Carl Friedrich Abel.
4. He maintained ties with major opera stars and was commissioned to write operas for various European theaters.
5. His keyboard Sonata in D, Op. 5, No. 2 (1766), reflects the brilliance associated with orchestral instruments in that key, as well as galant style.
 - a) The hallmarks of Classical style are evident.

D. Comparing C. P. E. Bach and J. C. Bach

1. The examples given for C. P. E. and J. C. Bach illustrate two sides of domestic music.
 - a) C. P. E. is personal, private. The performer plays for the performer, not necessarily an audience.
 - b) J. C. is sociable, outgoing. The performer plays for an audience.
2. Chamber music grew out of the galant style, such as that of J. C. and his keyboard sonatas.

IV. Intermission plays

- A. The mid-eighteenth century saw a move to more "natural" music.
- B. The new style might be traced to Galuppi, whose operas highlighted graceful singing.
- C. Galuppi wrote what they called *drama giocoso* (humorous drama) and is known as opera buffa—early comic opera.
- D. Even as serious opera turned to a more recitative-based style, comic opera thrived in little intermissions performed between acts of opera seria.
- E. The realism and expression of the characters in these works were seen to represent a realistic "animal" expression—thus imitating nature.
- F. Comic opera, then, represented a truer characterization of human nature.
- G. Intermezzos, or intermission plays, were performed during the intermissions of the newly standardized opera seria.
 1. Pergolesi's *La serva padrona* is the prime example of the intermission play.
 - a) The characters sing according to their conventional roles.
 - b) Instead of a single affect, *La serva padrona* allows comic contrasts, which foreshadows the need for contrast and balance associated with later music.

2. The arrival of *La serva padrona* in Paris created a debate between the natural style of the comedy and the stilted *tragédies lyriques*. This controversy became known as the *Querelle des Bouffons*.
 - a) The Enlightenment writer Jean-Jacques Rousseau was involved in the debate, favoring the natural style of the Italian comedies over his native French opera.
 - b) Rousseau linked the artificiality of French opera to issues of the court itself.

V. Operatic innovations

A. Opera and its “reforms”

1. Opera criticism often reflects social history; this is evident throughout the eighteenth century.
2. Niccolò Piccinni based his most famous opera *La buona figliuola* on a novel, which itself was a new genre in the eighteenth century.
 - a) Based on the English novel *Pamela*, it features social mobility.
 - b) When translated into Italian (both literally and socially, by Goldoni), the plot had to be altered to allow the characters to marry, to meet Italian laws forbidding a commoner to marry into upper classes.
3. Piccinni used sentimentality and rustic simplicity to make his music sound natural.
4. He sought to remove artifice and replace it with the newfound sentimental stylelets seen in the new genre of novel.

B. The reform operas of Christoph Willibald Gluck

1. Gluck also instituted reform in opera, but in a manner very different from Piccinni.
 - a) Gluck saw himself returning to ancient ways of presenting drama.
 - b) His first opera in this vein was based on the story of Orpheus, just as the first operas had been.
 - (1) The music does not include standard operatic fireworks such as coloratura.
 - (2) When Orpheus turns back to Eurydice, he does so to reassure her, not out of his own weakness. This represents Enlightenment ideals of noble self-sacrifice.
2. Gluck may have been accepted for his challenges to both Italian and French typical conventions because he was from Austrian Bohemia.
3. Since Gluck kept aspects associated with aristocratic values, it might seem like he was at odds with what Piccinni was doing. In fact, they were both trying to bring elements associated with the Enlightenment to operatic reform.
4. All of the recitative in *Orfeo ed Euridice* is accompanied, which signals a move away from basso continuo.
 - a) “Dry recitative” (*recitativo secco*) or “simple recitative” was used for ordinary dialogue prior to Gluck’s reforms.
5. Gluck was successful in attracting others to his ideals: even Rousseau noted he had been able to make a French opera natural.

6. Ultimately, Enlightenment composers sought to represent humanity.

C. Music and culture in the Enlightenment

1. Rousseau noted that eighteenth-century people were mentally/emotionally/intellectually enslaved to religion, social customs, and authority to maintain social order.
2. Ideas that originated in France spread to Germany, as well as to the American colonies via England.
3. Some rulers agreed with these principle; others did not,
 - a) Emperor Joseph II adopted many of these concepts in his own absolutism.
4. The careers of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven followed the evolution of personal freedoms envisioned by the *philosophes*.