

# The Reflection of the Baroque Era to Flute and Bassoon

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## Abstract

This study aims to assist the performance of the works by gathering data about the works for flute and bassoon which are in woodwind instruments of the Baroque era. In music history, the Baroque era is accepted that it starts with the years of 1600 and ends with death of Johann Sebastian Bach in 1750. During this period which lasted nearly 150 years, flute and bassoon which are in woodwind instruments, have an important place in instrumental music. Interestingly, before the Baroque period the flute and the bassoon were not often used for solo performances due to their limited technical capacity. After the developments that took place in sonatas and concertos, and the improvements in the technical capacity of the flute and bassoon, the composers were able to use these instruments more often in their works. Nowadays, the works for flute and bassoon by important composers of the Baroque era, Johann Sebastian Bach, Antonio Vivaldi and Georg Philipp Telemann, are accepted to be the keystone of instruments at educational and solo repertoire. At the end of study, it has been aimed to assist the rendition of the works by giving examples of sonatas and concertos written for flute and bassoon by Johann Sebastian Bach, Antonio Vivaldi and Georg Philipp Telemann. These examples aim to help with the interpretation of their work.

**Keywords:** Baroque Era, Flute, Bassoon.

## 1. Introduction

Baroque period comprises the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In the renaissance period, the beginning of enlightenment of the society and the theme of freedom in the cultural life was felt deeply in all branches of art. In the Medieval age the art was under the pressure of church and was meant to represent religious thoughts. However, with the renaissance, art started to include personal emotions, questioned the reality of everyday life and moved towards freedom.

The important music critics divided the Baroque period into three stages; the early, middle and the late Baroque period. In the early Baroque period between 1600 and 1650, there were so many schools and movements such as *Venice School*, *Florence School* and *Naples Harpsichord School*, where the practice of figured bass was highly common.

In the middle Baroque period between 1650 and 1700, all the techniques and musical systems reached a mature expression. Instrumental music reached an equal importance with the vocal music. Especially in German, Italian and French composers work, these techniques were underlined more. In the late Baroque period between 1700 and 1750, the balance between the melodic and rhythmic structure was more visual and composing techniques were given more importance.

The contrast in music was used in the Baroque period for the first time. This contrast was often used in the sound limit, rhythmic structure and in the expression of deep emotions through music. Also the notion of nuance was also valued more and broad expression of nuance was developed further. The improvement in the musical and technical expression supported the transition from modal system to tonal system and the development of the harmonic system. Due to such improvements the beginning and the end sentences of the music became clearer. In this period where the instrumental music stood out, apart from concertos and suites, there were also other forms of music such as oratorios, cantatas and operas. The other factor that symbolised the period was the importance of ornamentation in the sound. The sound that enriches or adds colours to a sound group is called ornamentation.

Today the pieces that Johann Sebastian Bach, Antonio Vivaldi and Georg Philipp Telemann wrote for flute and bassoon, who were the important composers of the period, are accepted as the corner stones in education and for solo repertoires. Seen the period as an early, middle and the late period, majority of the pieces that were written for flute and bassoons coincide the late Baroque period.

The ornamentation and complication that composers generally used in their works were the contrast to the previous period's plain and simple way of expression. This music language that was written at the time was difficult to interpret due to the insufficient structure of the instruments. Although the instruments have not fully evolved today, to overcome this issue requires professionalism from musicians.

## 2. Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741)

Antonio Vivaldi, an Italian composer and a violin player who lived between 1678 and 1741, was one of the most important figures of the Baroque period.

The composers were able to use the wind instruments in their solo performances as well as in the orchestras frequently due to the improvements in the playing techniques. Vivaldi was one of the important representatives of those composers. The composer has many concertos that were written for flute and bassoon. His works have important contributions for passing the period's style to today's educational repertoires and also for improving the musical and technical abilities on the instruments.

In his most works long musical intervals, technically demanding passages and emotionally dense themes stand out. That gives the performer a wide range of variety. The rhythmic progress that took place in the Baroque period, which was a distinctive feature of the period, can clearly be seen in Vivaldi's works.

The composer usually used two rests or semiquavers for the entry of the bassoon concertos. He also used the same rhythmic structure for the accompanying parties. Vivaldi used very strong and changeable rhythmic structure in his compositions. In the least expected moment the tempo might stop or go faster, adding the strong dynamics of the music to that, there is a magical music that reflects to a stage performance.

His pieces do not usually push the barriers of the instruments sounds in terms of playing techniques, but they require excellent finger techniques to play the technical passages and excellent control of tune to give the dense melodic flavour in the slow parts. His E Minor RV 484, A Minor RV 498 and C Major RV 471 Bassoon Concertos are important examples for that. Although he is known as the contributor to the progress of the violin's repertoires, he also wrote many pieces for the wind instruments. His best known flute pieces are the concertos. Apart from the contributions to the concertos, his works are the best examples of the Italian Baroque music. Vivaldi has close to 20 flute concertos, but his Op.10 Six Flute Concerto that was published in 1729 in Amsterdam is the best known concerto among them. His concertos are more modern than his sonatas, but they also resemble to the old form of the concertos as they progress slow- fast- slow and the slow sections are composed in *ritornellos* form. Although the concertos are composed with the different level of difficulties, usually their scales and arpeggios were structured with semiquavers; they are challenging to perform in terms of the finger techniques for the fast sections. Especially Op. 10 No.1 Storm at Sea (La tempesta di mare) RV 433, No.2 The Night (La Notte) RV 439, No.3 The Goldfinch (II Cardellino) RV 428 concertos require mastership to perform in terms of technical and musical form. Those three concertos, which are performed by today's musicians frequently, are the best examples for programmatic music.

### 3. Georg Philipp Telemann (1681-1767)

Georg Philipp Telemann, who lived between 1681 and 1767, was accepted as the most valuable composer in Germany in his period. Telemann, who was a close friend of another important composer, Bach, learned about other musical styles through his travels to other countries and synthesised those styles successfully with his own music. To express his admiration Handel says "He *can compose eight part motet with the same ease as somebody writes a letter*" (İlyasoğlu, 1994: p. 37), which is the proof of his talent.

Telemann's compositions have important place in educational repertoires for learning the period's style and improving the performing abilities. His works include all the new developments of the period in terms of rhythmical, musical and technical aspects.

As an example; a new innovation of the time, ornamental expression, became Telemann's works main foundation. This approach, which enabled the performer to express his imagination and his unique creativity without composer's expectations, brought a new dimension to music. Apart from the ornamentation, a flexible rhythmic structure that developed and matured in the Baroque music appears in Telemann's music.

Looking at the scores of his work, he often used staccato eighth and semiquaver rhythms in his work. Telemann's pieces for bassoon do not push the instrument's sounds to the limit in terms of playing techniques, but they have a rich expression from a musical perspective. The improvements in the harmonic structures can be observed clearly in the composer's works. Apart from the colourful expression, his musical sentences are the main characteristic features that shape the foundation of his compositions. His F Minor Sonata (TWV41:f1) can be shown as an example for that.

Telemann also wrote many pieces for flute. The best know piece is the Twelve Fantasias for solo flute. The fantasias that he wrote in rococo style between 1732- 1733 are the evidence of his extraordinary talent. Those pieces, which require a detailed work in terms of technical and musical approach, are also challenging for the breathing techniques. Apart from 12 Fantasias, he also wrote sonatas and concertos for flute and frequently used flute in chamber music.

### 4. Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Johann Sebastian Bach, who was from Germany and lived between 1685 and 1750, was one of the important representatives of the Baroque period's music and musical progress of the time, he was one of the leading figures of the late Baroque period, where composing techniques, rhythmic and melodic techniques peaked. He successfully used all the new improvements in his work and was accepted a good organ player rather than a good composer at the time.

The other interesting fact about Bach was that, although he never went out of Germany throughout his life; he played other countries music and synthesized other music with his style. His A Minor (BWV1034) and E Minor (BWV1030) sonatas that he composed for bassoon are valuable pieces for education as well as for performing. Those pieces do not challenge the performers in term of finger techniques, but looking at it from the musical perspective; he reflected the dynamics and the period's style in a correct way, which is very challenging for the composers.

Bach has 8 sonatas that he wrote for flute between 1720 and 1741. The first sonata, which was an A Minor, was dedicated to a French flute player, Pierre-Gabriel Buffardin (ca. 1690-1768) who was one of the best flute player at the time. (BWV1013) Looking at his sonatas in general, the fast parts were structured with semiquavers, arpeggios and ornamentation which represented the period's character and were used frequently. Beside that the German composer wrote equal solo for flute and harpsichord for the fast parts, but outlined flute more and kept the harpsichord as an accompaniment in the slow parts

Those sonatas, which are challenging to perform in terms of technical and musical perspective, are irreplaceable for musical education as well as for concert performances.

## 5. Conclusion

The period from the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century is called the Baroque period in music history. This period witnessed fundamental changes in music as well as in the other forms of art. Due to the enlightenment that began with renaissance and the decline of the church authority, artists started reflecting their own feelings in their works.

Especially the improvements that Antonio Vivaldi, Georg Philipp Telemann and Johann Sebastian Bach brought to the Baroque's music shaped today's music history. Those composers contributed to the development of concertos in their life time. They combined emotionally deep music with a simple way of expression and used technical progress intensively in their works. Also the ornamentation, which was used in the Baroque period frequently, was one of the main elements of their works.

The improvement in composing techniques and in instrumental music led the composers to look for different tunes. Overcoming the technical problems and instrument's sound limitation also made this possible. With this approach, bassoon and flute were often used as solo instruments. Especially the pieces that Vivaldi, Telemann and Bach composed for bassoon and flute, shows the improvements of the instrumental music in the period. Technically those compositions enable the performers to use their instruments excellently. They also let the performers have a broad interpretation of the pieces and reflect their own creativity.

This work has analyzed the Baroque period of music, its three important composers, their contributions to the development of music as well as their compositions for the bassoon and the flute. Apart from Bach, Vivaldi and Telemann, there are other composers, in the same period, who also wrote for the flute and the bassoon. Therefore, analyzing the works of these other composers from a different angle, and introducing them to today's musicians will also make a substantial contribution to their ongoing development.

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