

PASSAGE III

HUMANITIES: From Antell and Harris, *Western Civilization*.
© 1983 by Amsco School Publications, Inc.

A GLORIOUS ERA IN MUSIC

The great change that took place in music around the year 1600 occurred in Florence, where a group of Italian poets and artists met to discuss classical drama. They thought that the actors of ancient Greece and Rome had either sung their roles or spoken them to musical accompaniment. So the Florentines too wanted to write music that would set off words. (In sixteenth-century music, an elaborate style of writing had generally made words secondary and frequently unintelligible.) As a leading spokesman said, "Let the word be the master, not the servant, of the music."

For words to be masters rather than servants, they had to be clearly understood. This led to an emphasis on solos, for both voices and instruments. And of course an emphasis on communication gave the listener new importance too. In a way the spirit of Renaissance individualism expressed in art and literature was now to be expressed in music.

Baroque music meant much more than an emphasis on words and on solos. There were new musical forms as well. One was opera, the union of drama and music. One of the very first operas was *Orfeo* by Claudio Monteverdi, first produced in 1607. The composer used an orchestra to create a dramatic mood for the solo voices, which acted out the ancient Greek myth of the poet Orpheus and his beloved wife, Eurydice.

Another musical form of the baroque period was the oratorio, a composition that tells a dramatic story but, unlike opera, does not use stage settings, costumes, or gestures. Most oratorios are based on a religious subject, such as the Exodus from Egypt or events in the life of Christ. Related to the oratorio is the cantata, usually shorter and lacking a dramatic narrative.

The baroque period also witnessed the development of many musical instruments as we know them today. The organ came into its full splendor. Other instruments that took their present form included the oboe, bassoon, trumpet, trombone, violin, viola, cello, and double bass.

Baroque music flourished in Italy, and Italian musicians had enormous influence elsewhere in Europe.

Monteverdi, choirmaster of St. Mark's Cathedral in Venice, composed operas (only a few of which survive) and also many religious works and shorter vocal pieces called madrigals. His contemporary Giovanni Gabrieli was the organist at St. Mark's. Gabrieli was a pioneer in developing the concerto. His music was also the first to indicate dynamic markings (degrees of volume) and specify which instruments were to be played when a work was performed.

Elsewhere in Europe the baroque style was modified somewhat according to local needs. In Germany, Heinrich Schütz—a pupil of Gabrieli's and director of music at the court of Dresden—wrote oratorios and other religious compositions for Protestant services. In France, the court of Louis XIV boasted Jean Baptiste Lully (born Lulli in Florence), who wrote ballets and operas for the king's pleasure. In England, James II and William and Mary were patrons of Henry Purcell. He wrote both religious works for Anglican services and dramatic music that included an opera, *Dido and Aeneas*.

The two giants of the baroque period, Johann Sebastian Bach and George Frederick Handel, were born in the same year, 1685. Bach held various posts in German cities, but was thought of primarily as an organist. Few of his works were published during his lifetime, but since the nineteenth century he has been recognized as a musical genius. Bach's works include hundreds of compositions for the organ and clavier (a predecessor of the piano); 300 sacred cantatas; and such monumental religious works as the *B Minor Mass* and the *St. Matthew Passion*.

Born in Germany, Handel studied in Italy and settled permanently in England after his patron, the ruler of Hanover, had become King George I. Handel wrote several dozen operas but is best known for his noble and dramatic oratorios, mostly notably the *Messiah*. An anthem Handel wrote for the coronation of George II has been performed at every coronation since.

21. According to this passage, baroque music was born in:
- Italy.
 - Spain.
 - Germany.
 - England.

GO ON TO THE NEXT PAGE.