

Musical Baroque in Manfred Bukofzer's perspective

Review

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Manfred F. Bukofzer, *Music in the Baroque Era*¹, London, J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1948.

The author of this study, Manfred F. Bukofzer (1910-1955), is an acknowledged German origin American humanist. He graduated in Berlin at *Stern* Conservatory and at *Hochschule für Musik*, being the student of Schering, Sachs, Wolf, Blume (Musicology), and of Hindemith (Composition). He left his country in 1933 to study at *Basel* University, where he achieved the doctorate (1936). He settled in 1939 in the U.S.A. and was Professor at Berkeley-California University since 1941 till the end of his life. His musical career is based on early period researches, and especially, the baroque one. *Music in the Baroque Era* study is one of reference in the baroque field, criticized by some scholars because of the german preference for the XVIIth century musical style development, diminishing the importance of the *opera* (born in Italy). His musical preoccupation also included the specialization in XIV-XVIth centuries English music and music theory, and in the same time, he was recognized as a gifted conductor (Sydney, 2001, p. 567).

From the beginning, we notice the German tradition's revaluation for the Baroque historical assessment, and the book's subtitle – "FROM *Monteverdi* TO *Bach*" – certifies this position. Somehow, surprises us that the author didn't conceive the subtitle "From *Camerata Fiorentina* to *Händel*" supporting thereby the *opera* – the most spoiled, controverted, disputed, praised, but also the most expensive and the most criticized performance displayed just from his early stages at royal courts in order to praise the nobility and the clergy. Therefore, it surprises us that the author elected Bach for the book's subtitle, although himself characterizes Händel "the last great master of baroque music and exact contemporary of Bach and Domenico Scarlatti" (Bukofzer, 1948, p. 314).

The study comprises 492 pages, from which 411 are effective researches – organised in twelve chapters² and subchapters, followed by *Appendices*. The

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¹ *Music in the Baroque Era* was published for the first time in 1947 in the U.S.A., at Vail-Ballou Press, and one year later, in Great Britain, at London, J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd.

last ones comprise 27 pages for *Bibliography* – with almost 950 books titles, and even so, incomplete, as the author recognizes: “Although it is the largest bibliography of baroque music ever printed it is far from being complete.” (Bukofzer, 1948, p. xiv) This list is preceded by another one, the *Checklist of Baroque Books on Music* – containing almost 500 titles, of extreme importance for those interested in the fascinating Baroque world. This is an overwhelming study, it comprises a huge content of facts, very hard to overfill into a limited time period, it could be understood and analyzed possessing further musical, historical and geographical information, quite profound. With this title, the author opens the way for some next researches, as we find out from Chapter IX of his study: “[...] the intricate interchange between his vocal and instrumental music have not yet been systematically investigated. They represent one of the main obligations of the future Händel research.” (Bukofzer, 1948, p. 345)

The Preface, which belongs to the author, notifies us that this is the first English language Baroque music history that it is for the music student, but also for music lover. Yet, we think that this study, through the detailed way of analyzing the inner subjects, overpasses the knowledge of the music lover. Also, in the preface, the author recognizes that “My aim has been not the expatiation on the obvious but the explanation of the specific musical results of baroque style” (Bukofzer, 1948, p. xiv), avoiding or reducing to a minimum the biographical information found in dictionaries.

The first chapter informs us, as it was naturally, about the meaning of *baroque* term: “The term *barocco* had originally a derogatory meaning that clearly reflects the light in which former generations have seen the seventeenth century. The baroque was taken to be a degenerate form of the Renaissance, another ‘dark age’ between the limpid *cinquecento* and the Classicism of the eighteenth century.” (Bukofzer, 1948, p. 1) Another extremely important aspect consists in the setting in time of this age – which, broadly, covers (1600-1750) – divided into three stages. These make references to Italy – in the other countries we found a delay. For Italy we can talk about the early Baroque (1580-1630), the middle Baroque (1630-1680) and the late Baroque (1680-1730). Of huge importance is considered by the author, the passing from Renaissance to Baroque, which differs from all other stylistic changes because the old style wasn’t cast away, but it was preserved deliberately as a secondary language. So, the composers became bilingual, the old style – *stile antico* preserved as a model the palestrinian counterpoint, and the monody was

² These are: Ch. I-Renaissance versus Baroque Music; Ch. II-Early Baroque in Italy; Ch. III-Early and Middle Baroque in the Northern Countries; Ch. IV-Italian music of the Middle Baroque; Ch. V-French Music under the Absolutism; Ch. VI-English Music during the Commonwealth and Restoration; Ch. VII-Late Baroque: Luxuriant Counterpoint and Concerto Style; Ch. VIII-Fusion of National Styles: Bach; Ch. IX-Coordination of National Styles: Händel; Ch. X-Form in Baroque Music; Ch. XI-Musical Thought of the Baroque Era; Ch. XII-Sociology of Baroque Music.

empowered for the new style – *stile moderno*. The monody – this *laboratory creation* of *Camerata Fiorentina* – was therefore, the opponent to the Renaissance writing. The author Manfred Bukofzer remarks the observation made by the composer and scholar Angelo Berardi (1636-1694) in his work, *Miscellanea Musicale* (1689): “The old masters [of the Renaissance] had only one style and one practice, the moderns have three styles, church, chamber and theatre style, and two practices, the first and the second.” (Bukofzer, 1948, p. 4) The *stile antico-stile moderno* opposition, like the *prima prattica-seconda prattica* and *stylus gravis-stylus luxurians* opposition, is more thoroughly reflected through the opposition of Renaissance and Baroque musical language elements.

In the first seven chapters the author invites us to find out the musical Baroque chronological evolution within some European countries – Italy, The Northern Country, England, Germany – what events took place, what musical styles have been heard, which composers have left their mark on the artistic life – all these information being followed by a plenty of musical examples. Chapters VIII and IX are dedicated to the two peaks of the Baroque music – Bach and, respectively Händel –, and the last three chapters refer to the form, musical thought and sociology of the baroque music.

So, the Italian early Baroque is labeled about 1600 by the emergence of recitative or *stile rappresentativo*, with a crucially contribution in the emergence of opera, the first work in this style being *Dafne* (1597?), composed by Jacopo Peri (1561-1633) and staged in Florence, followed in the same year in Rome, by the first oratory *Rappresentazione di Anima e di Corpo*, by Emilio de’ Cavalieri. After Florence, have followed Mantua, where, in 1607 took place the staging of the first masterpiece from this style history: *Orfeo*, by Claudio Monteverdi (1567-1643) – characterized through full of pathos – *stile rappresentativo*, closed musical forms: strophic *air*, *madrigal*, dance song, chamber duet, lavish orchestration considered revolutionary at that time.

The *opera* continued its success rising in Rome – after 1620, and Venice – after 1640. Stylistically, every city contributed at the style progress, so that the early opera could be divided into Florentine recitative opera, choir Roman opera and solo Venetian opera. The beginning of the Venetian opera is overlapped with the opening in 1637 of the first commercial opera theatre, *San Cassiano*. While Italy is thought to be the first musical pole because of the emergence of the monody, the second pole was England with an abstract instrumental style influence, took over by Netherlands and followed by the other European countries. English music in this stage overlapped only chronologically, not stylistically with the Italian one, English composers’ works belonging to the Renaissance polyphonic style.

In Germany, the early Baroque music was influenced by the Italian one, used by the south German composers, and in the middle Baroque was influenced by the French music.

The middle Baroque is the cradle of *belcanto* style, emerged almost simultaneously between 1630-1640 into *cantata* and Italian *opera*, being associated with two famous composers of the age – Francesco Cavalli 1602-1676) in Venice and Luigi Rossi (1597-1653) in Rome. With the harmonic abridgement, stylistic evolution of the musical language made in middle Baroque the differentiation of monody in recitative, *arioso* and air. Like the *belcanto*, the tonality emerged from two cores: the Neapolitan opera and the Bolognese instrumental school. The emergence of tonality around 1680 opened a harmonic frame which enabled large forms development, contrapuntal writing, followed by the differentiation between *opera seria* and *opera buffa* – the last one considered “the most conspicuous innovation in the field of opera [...]” (Bukofzer, 1948, p. 239). With the baroque musical events, are mentioned during this study many composers. Even not all of them are walking today on “the celebrities’ avenue”, their contribution let a sign in the musical artistic life of their working country, though, not in few cases, these weren’t identical with their native country. The author acquaintances us with the *intermediates* between composers and audience – the performers – and in the same time with every period style, starting from early Baroque *gorgia* and ending with the astonishing virtuosity ornamental passages rendered by that age *stars* – the castrati (Farinelli, Cafarelli, Nicolini) – and also by the two *primadonnas* of Händel’s operas (Faustina Bordoni and Francesca Cuzzoni).

In the instrumental field, the best acknowledged performers were the composers themselves: D. Scarlatti, J. Händel, J. S. Bach. As a crowning of the outstanding musical cumulations, the author reflects through the end of his study, the last two above mentioned composers, which he understands them like “two great individualities of fundamentally different psychological attitudes” (Bukofzer, 1948, p. 349). Concerning Händel, the author offers us the specification about his well-known *borrowings* existing in his works, noticing that the ones of his own works are more substantially than the ones from other composers, which is confirmed in the volume *Händel’s Operas* (Dean & Knapp, 2006).

Music in the Baroque Era study belonging to the teacher and musicologist Manfred F. Bukofzer, refers to the about 150 years of Baroque music which permeated the most developed economically, politically and culturally European countries – Italy, France, Germany, England, with short references to The Iberian Peninsula, New Spain, and Colonial America. We’ll find, also, an analysis for some musical species of length (*opera*, *oratory*, *cantata*, *concert*), but even the particularization for some, such as, the airs types in Händel’s operas. We’ll discover that the music life in the Baroque era recorded extraordinary beginnings for the language music evolution: the *recitative* or *stile rappresentativo* was seen as “the most important turning point in the entire music history” (Bukofzer, 1948, p. 25), contributing to the emergence of *opera*, *oratory* and *cantata*. At her turn, *cantata* represented “the

most valuable vocal music of the late Baroque” (Bukofzer, 1948, p. 245), the tonality – “the most momentous harmonic innovation of the baroque period” (Bukofzer, 1948, p. 385), and the *belcanto* style – “one of the most significant contributions to the stylistic development of the baroque era” (Bukofzer, 1948, p. 118).

We can conclude that the musical Baroque is closely related with some characteristic elements – *Camerata Fiorentina*, *recitative*, *monody*, *opera* (*Opera Seria*, *Opera Buffa*), *cantata*, *oratory*, *aria*, ornament, affect, *castrato*, *concert*, entertainment, *basso continuo* (Riemann named the baroque period *Generallbass-Zeitalter*³ – Bukofzer, 1948, p. 11) – all of them representing essential compounds for the period perception. We think that *Music in the Baroque Era* study is very useful also for the ones professional preoccupied and involved in the present revival which are part of the *Revival* trend-renaissance of the Baroque music (including the Renaissance and Medieval one), the information representing the *initium* for the masterly craftsmanship.

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³ “[...] has not hesitated to call the Baroque Era *Generallbass-Zeitalter*.”