THE INTERWOVEN EVOLUTION OF THE EARLY KEYBOARD AND BAROQUE CULTURE

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Barroco in Culture

• 1600-1750, ending the year of J.S. Bach’s death
• Portuguese for “misshapen pearl,” meant to be derogatory
• Around the time of the Enlightenment
• Elaborate, overdone ornamentation
• Shakespeare, architecture, statue of David
Barroco in Music

• Music as a form of art to be enjoyed for the sake of music, not just to serve another function

• Improvisation, rhythmic drive, consonance, counterpoint, overall thick texture and ornamentation

• Birth of the opera, other new genres

• Growth of new instruments

  • Violin, keyboard instruments
THE DEVELOPING KEYBOARD INSTRUMENT
The Organ

- Though a keyboard instrument, it is the most different in how it produces sound
  - Sound created through pipes rather than strings
  - Rich and full sound because of pipes
  - Pipes create differing sounds and timbres
- Used mostly in sacred settings, such as mass
  - Often arranged from chorales
The Clavichord

- Probably the most similar early ancestor of the grand piano
- Small keyboard instrument, not capable of a large volume of sound
- Able to be in homes because it was a little smaller
  - A favorite for composers such as J.S. Bach
- Could play multiple lines at once, unlike other instruments of the time
- Capable of creating dynamics through its construction
- Participated in ensembles, solo works, basso continuo
Construction of the Clavichord

• Less keys than the modern piano

• To create sound, performer presses down key and strings are struck, similar to the piano

• Struck rather than plucked strings gives the ability to create dynamic contrast

• Small strings, little sound

• No pedal as with the modern piano
Clavichord as Barroco

- Overdone elaboration: trills, ornaments, singing melodies with thick textures
- Doctrine of Affections-audience can be moved emotionally through performances
- Intervals of thirds and sixths as consonant, dissonance
- Improvisation, a key theme during the Baroque Era
- Ie: operas, performances, embellishments
The Harpsichord

• Referred to as the “concert grand” of the time--king of the keyboard instruments

• Larger than the clavichord, so could create much more sound

• Able to perform solo and ensemble works

• Could also play multiple keys at once, thus creating counterpoint, dissonant and consonant chords, trills
Construction of the Harpsichord

- Largest of the stringed keyboard instruments
- Sound created still through pressing down of keys
- When key was pressed, a lever was activated that would lift a wooden jack and cause a quill to pluck the string
- Thus no dynamics were possible because string was plucked rather than struck
- No pedal as with modern piano
Harpsichord and Baroque Culture

• Because of lack of dynamics, other means were used to create interest

• Trills and long ornaments filled the empty space left by no pedal or dynamics

• Capable to create thick textures and sparkling sound that stood out

• Solo and ensemble instrument, accompanying operas, solo performers, improvisatory with figured bass
Less Prominent Keyboard Instruments

- Other less significant keyboard instruments were still being used
- Included eschiquier, virginal, spinet, and other less prominent instruments
- These were smaller, quieter, and had a less sparkling timbre
The Pianoforte

• The direct ancestor of our modern grand piano

• Created in 1709 by Bartolomeo Cristofori

• This instrument was named for its ability to create dynamics

• Bigger than the clavichord, louder sound like the harpsichord

• Referred to as “harpsichord with soft and loud”
Construction of the Pianoforte

• Similar to the clavichord in that sound was created by the strike of a hammer rather than plucked by a quill

• Speed of the hammer hitting the strings created dynamics. In other words, the speed and force in which the keys are pressed down

• Keys heavier than those of harpsichord, with bigger strings that could create more sound than the clavichord

• Damper pedal added a new dimension to the sound
Transitioning into this new instrument

• Tough transition due to heavier keys and different sound

• Differing style of articulation than the harpsichord

  • Key pressed down rather than released caused change of sound

• A gradual increase in awareness of this instrument and having music written for it gave the pianoforte new popularity in the Classical Period
Summary of Keyboard Instruments

• Clavichord most useful as an instrument in homes

• Harpsichord was the primary keyboard instrument in Baroque due to its more resonant, sparkling sound quality

• Solo and ensemble works

• Pianoforte was the most important bridge to the later grand piano

• Not appreciated until closer to Classical Period
HOW KEYBOARD MUSIC EVOLVED
Keyboard Music

• Music written for the clavichord and harpsichord was often ornamented with many trills and embellishments to add more texture to the sound
• Lack of dynamic markings in Baroque music because of harpsichord
• As the piano forte took over, increase in dynamic and phrase markings, also pedaling
• New growth of thinner texture due to simpler preferences of late Baroque and early Classical Era
• Music now should be interpreted with these in mind, but played to the full extent that the modern grand piano is capable of
Bibliography


