

ON THE ORNAMENTATION OF BAROQUE MUSIC

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Abstract: *The contrastive mentalities of the two nations represent the generating sources of their music: Italians are extroverted and passionate, used to expressing their joy and pain directly and spontaneously, whereas the French filter their feelings intellectually. This is the way the both contrastive mentalities gave birth to two contrastive styles of musical expression. Italian music is characterised by drama, spontaneity, a fantastic richness of musical forms and a colourful expression, which also includes bizarre elements. Its opposite, French music, emerged as a reaction to the volcanic music: it is intellectual, aristocratic, and it provides clear musical forms and precise rules for interpretation. These contrastive elements of expression influenced the entire European musical life strongly, and led to a gradual polarisation of baroque music in relation to the two styles.*

Key words: *baroque, Italian music, French music, mentality, difference.*

French Ornamentation Compared to Italian Ornamentation

In the European art music from the 17th and the first part of the 18th century, there was no stylistic unity. Different compositional and interpretative manners existed in different musical centres, which evolved farther away from the common roots of the musical baroque.

The musical communication among these centres was established during the journeys of the famous interpreters and composers of the time. By their trips, the musicians familiarized the Europeans with the musical language characteristic to their native places.

Starting from a common source, Italian music, the baroque European music, became more diverse.

The stylistic diversity, which emerged mainly from the specifics of each nation,

began to express itself by the means of baroque music. The tendency towards diversification was promoted through the inevitable connections and the reciprocal influences of the traveller-musicians and it, finally, resulted in two contrastive forms: the French and the Italian style.

The emergence of these forms of musical expression is not randomly related to the two peoples. The contrastive mentalities of the two nations represent the generating sources of music: Italians are extroverted and passionate; they use to express their joy and pain directly and spontaneously, whereas the French filter their feelings intellectually. This is the way the both contrastive mentalities gave birth to two contrastive styles of musical expression. Italian music is characterised by drama, spontaneity, a fantastic richness of musical forms and a colourful expression, which also includes bizarre elements. Its

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opposite, French music, emerged as a reaction to the volcanic music; it is intellectual, aristocratic, and it provides clear musical forms and precise rules for interpretation. These contrastive elements of expression influenced the entire European musical life strongly, and led to a gradual polarisation of baroque music in relation to the two styles. One element that should not be ignored is the traditional political, cultural and spiritual rivalry which existed between the two nations. This rivalry marked the two musical styles, the conceptions of the music lovers and the contemporary professional musicians. The French considered the Italian music tasteless and vulgar. On the other hand, the Italians considered the French music inexpressive and useless, destined for the ears, and not for the heart. To understand the atmosphere of the period and of its musical rivalries, some of the most controversial opinions are worth to be quoted:

Marin Mersenne (*Harmonie universelle* – Paris, 1636-37, p. 356): ‘Italians strive themselves to render passions, spiritual states ... for us, the French, it is enough to please the ears’ [1].

Georg Muffat (*Florilegium*, I. – Augsburg, 1695): ‘The French are characterized by a natural melodic spirit and suppleness – a soothing character which is dispersed by excessive and useless variations, by too frequent and uninspired intervals’ [2].

Francois Ragueneau (*Parallele des Italiens et des Francais, en ce qui regarde la musique et les opera*) [3]: [The French] ‘play the violin with much more delicacy and care, in comparison to the Italians who agonise every time: the cellist tortures his instrument and his body, he loses control and is so agitated, as if this impetuous movement were an infirmity. I have not seen anyone so seized with passion while playing

the violin, like the famous Arcangelo Corelli, whose eyes reddened countless times, whose face maimed, and whose eyes moved as if in agony, so that the interpretation of the music seemed to have transformed him into a different man’ [4].

Quantz (chapter X. 19): ‘Italian music is less balanced; French music is yet much too restrained and, probably, because of that, in French music even what is new seems old. But, the French style should not be despised; we recommend to beginners to combine the decent and clear conduct of the French interpretation with the Italian clear-obscure’ [4].

Quantz (chapter XVIII): ‘The taste of these two nations determine the others’ taste as well.’

These two contrastive styles led to two different styles of ornamentation. In the Italian style, the figurative ornamentation was primordial for the use of the proper ornamentations. The Italians preferred a spontaneous improvisation, an embellishment of the melodies through melodic notes, figures and rhythmic-melodious cells. The French used the ornamentation of the musical sounds as the basic unity of melody.

There are some quotations about the French and Italian ornamentation:

Quantz (chapter XIV, p. 2): ‘*Man kann das Adagio, in Unsehung der Art dasselbe zu spielen, und wie es nötig ist, mit Manieren auszuführen, auf zweyerlen Art betrachten; entweder im französischen, oder im italienischen Geschmache...Die erste Art erfordert einen netten und an einander hangenden Vortrag des Gesanges, und eine Auszierung desselben mit den wesentlichen Manieren, als Vorschlägen, ganzen und halben Trillern, Mordanten, Doppelschlägen, battemens, flatterments, u.d.gl.; sonst aber keine weiltläufigten Passagien, oder großen*

zusatz willkürlicher Verzierungen...' [The interpretation of the Adagio and its ornamentation can be dealt with according to two ways: the French or the Italian way ... The first way demands an engaging and fluent interpretation, and an ornamentation of the melody with basic elements such as appoggiaturas, trills, mordents, groups, vibratos, but without further arbitrary ornamentations] [4].

Quantz (chapter XIV, p. 3): '*Die französische Art das Adagio auszieren, kann man durch gute Anweisung, ohne die Harmonie zu verstehen, erlernen. Zu italiänischen hingegen wird die Wissenschaft der Harmonie unumgänglich erfordert.*' [The French ornamentation of the Adagio can be learned under good guidance, without having to study harmonies. In comparison, the Italian ornamentation requires knowledge of harmony] [4].

Quantz (chapter XIV, p. 4): '*Daß die französischen Componisten die Auszierungen mehrenteils mit hin schreiben; und der Ausführer also auf nichts weiter zu denken habe, als die gut vorzutragen, ist schon gesaget worden. Im italiänischen Geschmache wurden, in vorigen Zeiten, gar keine Auszierungen darzu geseßet; sondern alles der Willkühr des Ausführiers überlassen;...Die denn nicht zu läugner ist, daß in der italiänischen Musik fast eben so viel auf den Ausführer, als die Componisten; in der französischen aber, auf den Componisten weit mehrals auf den Ausführer ankomme, wenn das Stück seine vollkommene Wirkung thun soll.*' [The French composers used to display most of their ornaments; thus, the interpreter did not have anything else to do than to interpret them correctly. Italians preferred not to display the ornamentations at all; they were left to the interpreters' ingenuity ...

One cannot deny the fact that, in the Italian music, the interpreters have the same merit as the composers; but, in the French music, the contribution of the composers to the perfect achievement of the melody is greater than that of the interpreters] [4].

After all, the two musical styles got together through their synthesis, from which the German baroque emerged, and through the great artists of the time such as Telemann, Händel and Bach.

References

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