

Classification of Styles in 17th-Century Music

—A proliferation of styles existed. On the surface, it was a question of pronouncing either for or against ‘modern’ music.

—*Della music dell’ eta nostra* (1640) of Pietro Della Valle. For Della Valle (1586–1652) the fundamental distinction is between a concept of music as counterpoint, and another of harmony of three identifiable components: ‘counterpoint’, ‘song’, and ‘sound’.

—Vincenzo Giustiniani (1564–1638). Essentially a cultivated musical amateur. He made a list of what he considered to be the main types of music of the time:

- (1) Madrigals of Arcadelt, Lassus, Striggio, Rore etc.
- (2) Marenzio, Palestrina, Giovanelli (‘delectable’ polyphonists—more advanced than those of group 1).
- (3) The vogue for virtuoso singing which flourished in Rome after 1575, and later in the northern courts of Mantua and Ferrara.
- (4) The ‘great artifice’ of the madrigals of the Prince of Venosa and his Neapolitan circle.
- (5) Caccini and the other great singers of monody.
- (6) Sacred music for *cori spezzati*.

This picture of the co-existence of various types of music gives rise, in 17th-century music theory, to the notion of ‘style’.

—For musicians, these notions of differences in styles aroused particular controversy in the field of Catholic church music, dominated as it was by the traditional stylistic criteria of Counter-Reformation polyphony. This polyphony remained hallowed in that it did not take on board compositional innovations.

—Example of the above. In 1643 Marco Scacchi (Roman composer, *maestro* to the king of Poland) criticised certain psalms of Paul Siefert. In these psalms, Scacchi criticises a number of modern licences of style: the use of the basso continuo, and certain chromatic figurations incompatible with the *a cappella* style traditionally associated with polyphonic settings of the psalms.

—The two styles, ancient and modern, have equal dignity but differing functions. Each is governed by its own laws and constitution; mixing them together would compromise not only their effectiveness but also, above all, their grammatical correctness. As a result, the old-fashioned Counter-Reformation polyphony was completely removed from any concept of historical change.

—Scacchi was still aware of the Monteverdi–Artusi controversy. Over and above the formal and structural distinctions between *stile antico* and *stile moderno*, the function and social destination of music gave rise to a further, threefold classification of style:

* *stylus ecclesiasticus* (church)

* *stylus cubicularis* (chamber)

* *stylus theatricalis* (theatre)

—Another classificatory work showing the impossibility of a perfect reconciliation between formal and functional classifications was Athanasius Kircher's *Musurgia universalis* (Rome, 1650). This work makes the distinction between *stylus impressus* and *stylus expressus*, which does justice to the dual definition—'anthropological' and artistic—of the musical styles, their contexts and effects.

An identical style (or composition) will have different individuals or societies (*stylus impressus*). The difference is determined by the emotional constitution of the individuals or societies concerned, together

with the conditioning of climate and race.

The *stylus expressus* defines the 'particular calculation and method' (i.e. internal structure) and poetic characteristics of the composition.

Scientific Thought and Music Theory

—Behind Kircher's classification of musical style there lies the psychological theory of the affections, legacy of the natural magic of the 16th century, in particular of the *musicae vis mirifica* (the wondrous power of music). This was based on a supposed harmony and affinity between numerical proportion in music and the passions of the human heart.

The *seicento* attempted a systematic rationalisation of the doctrine of the affections.

e.g. In *Les Passions de l'ame* (1649), Descartes distinguishes between six basic affections: admiration, love, hate, desire, joy and sadness.

—According to ancient physiology, the affections are derived from the various combinations of the four cardinal humours of the body (blood, phlegm, bile, black bile), which themselves correspond to the four temperaments (sanguine, phlegmatic, choleric, melancholic), the four elements (air, water, fire, earth), and the four primary qualities (hot and moist, cold and moist, hot and dry, cold and dry).

In the human body, a balanced relationship between the four cardinal humours favours a condition of salubrious harmony; imbalance tends to produce a state of morbid discord. Through the diffusion of the *esprits animaux* in the body, it is possible for the particular melodic, rhythmic and harmonic characteristics of a musical composition to influence, when perceived by the ear, the humoral balance of the individual.

This provided an effective scientific rationale for the doctrine of *musica pathetica*. As such, the chief function for 17th-century music theory was to differentiate precisely the relationships between the various individual elements of musical form and technique and individual affections.

There also exists a significant body of work by other 17th-century theorists, mathematicians and men of learning, who describe the expressive effect of particular intervals, tonalities, consonances and dissonances.

However, the terms of reference of the argument widen with these new theorists. The fundamental problem is less the doctrine of the affections than the scientific investigation (both speculative and empirical) of the precise physical definitions of consonances and dissonances, of intervallic relationships and of the temperament of the octave.

The 17th-century mind seeks not to predict and interpret relationships of general analogy and affinity, but rather to investigate measurable relationships of identity and diversity.