

Musical Forms in the Baroque

Vocal

Opera

A drama that is primarily sung, accompanied by instruments, and presented on stage. Operas typically alternate between recitative, speech-like song that advances the plot, and arias, songs in which characters express feelings at particular points in the action. Choruses and dances are also frequently included.

Oratorio

An extended musical drama with a text based on religious subject matter, intended for performance without scenery, costume or action. Oratorio originally meant prayer hall, a building located adjacent to a church that was designed as a place for religious experiences distinct from the liturgy. It differs from an opera in that it does not use theatrical scenery, costumes, or acting stylizations.

Messiah, GF Handel

Cantata

An extended piece consisting of a succession of recitatives and set pieces such as arias, duets and choruses. Originating in early 17th century Italy, the cantata began as a secular work composed for solo voice and basso continuo, most likely intended for performance at private social gatherings. Many of these works were published, suggesting that they were performed by professional musicians and amateurs alike.

The difference between a large cantata and a small oratorio is hard to determine, but normally a cantata uses smaller, more various forces, attempts to fill a smaller dramatic canvas, and admits a much wider latitude in form.

Cantatas were performed in Lutheran churches while oratorios were performed in concert halls called oratoriums.

One can think of Bach's 6 Christmas Cantatas together as an Oratorio.

Christmas Cantata, JS Bach

Instrumental

Sonata

Sonata most commonly designated a work in several movements for one or more instruments (most frequently violins) and basso continuo.

Cello Sonata No. 1, A. Scarlatti

Trio Sonata

A Sonata for 2 solo instruments and continuo.

Trio Sonata Op. 3, n. 2, A. Corelli A

Concerto

Derived from the Italian *concertare* (to join together, unite), the concerto took several forms during the baroque era. Until the early 18th century, a concerto was simply a composition that united a diverse ensemble consisting of voices, instruments or both.

Later in the seventeenth century, the concerto began to assume its modern definition: a multi-movement work for instrumental soloist (or group of soloists) and orchestra.

Recorder Concerto in C Major RV 444 Allegro, A. Vivaldi

Concerto Grosso

Taking its cue from the *canzonas* and *sonatas* of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, which used contrasting groups of instruments to great effect, the concerto grosso alternates a small group of soloists with a larger ensemble.

Concerto Grosso in Re magg, Alessandro Stradella

Suite

Based on the traditional pairing of dances in the Renaissance, the suite was the first multi-movement work for instruments. The suite was essentially a series of dances in the same key, most or all of them in two-part form.

Around the middle of the 17th century in Germany the sequence of *allemande*, *courante*, *sarabande* and *gigue* became relatively standard, although other dance movements, such as additional *allemandes* or *courantes*, *boureés*, *gavottes* and *minuets*, were often inserted. Most suites also began with an introductory movement such as a *prelude*, *overture* or *fantasia*.

Sonate Op.5 n°12 "La Follia", Arcangelo Corelli