CHAPTER9

CHAPTER 9: VOCAL MUSIC OF THE EARLY BAROQUE AND THE INVENTION OF OPERA

Chapter Outline

Prelude. (CHWM 182–83)

Around 1600, at the beginning of what is known as the Baroque period, Italian musicians created new musical idioms, styles, and genres in secular and sacred vocal and instrumental music. They believed that music should move the listener’s emotions. Italian trends continued to dominate musical fashions.

I. General Characteristics of Baroque Music (CHWM 183–88, NAWM 66)

Baroque composers sought to write music that was expressive of the affections.

1. The second practice   
   *Claudio Monteverdi* used striking dissonances and deliberately broke the rules of counterpoint in order to dramatize poetic texts. **Music: NAWM 66**
2. Artusi-Monteverdi controversy   
   When he was criticized by *Giovanni Maria Artusi,*Monteverdi defended himself by distinguishing between the first practice of sixteenth-century counterpoint and the second practice, in which expressing the text is more important than following the traditional rules of counterpoint.
3. Rhythm and texture   
   Two types of rhythm, very flexible and very metric, were often used in succession to provide contrast. During this century, bar lines became common for the first time. Seventeenth-century music typically emphasizes homophony with prominent bass and treble lines.
4. Basso continuo   
   In the notational system called *basso continuo*or *thoroughbass,*a melody (or melodies) and a bass line were written out, but the harmony was filled in by performers playing one or more *continuo instruments,*like the harpsichord or theorbo. Composers indicated the appropriate harmonies with *figured bass.*The*realization*of a bass varied according to the type of piece and skill and taste of the player. Not all pieces used basso continuo.
5. The concertato medium   
   Seventeenth-century composers frequently used the *concertato medium,*combining voices with instruments, to create a musical *concerto,*such as a concerted madrigal or a sacred concerto.

**In Performance: Realizing the Basso Continuo**  
A basso continuo part can be realized by performers in various ways, from plain chords to elaborate improvisations. The continuo players had to be sensitive to the soloist’s style, and manuals were published to instruct musicians on creating appropriate realizations. While the style of improvisation varied over time and geographical region, the performer and performance, not the composer and work, were the central focus.

1. Chords and dissonance   
   Musicians came to think of vertical sonorities as chords, and of dissonances as nonchord tones.
2. Chromaticism   
   Chromaticism was used to express intense emotions, to suggest harmonic exploration, and to create distinctive subjects for imitative counterpoint.
3. *Cantus mollis*and *durus*  
   In the early seventeenth century, musicians still conceived their music within the system of church modes, but considered each mode to belong to one of two affective areas, *cantus mollis*or *cantus durus.*By the last third of the seventeenth century, composers were writing *tonal music,*within the system of major and minor keys.
4. Tonality   
   The change from modality to *tonality*was gradual. The consistent use of certain compositional techniques eventually led to a set of common procedures.

II. Early Opera (CHWM 188–96, NAWM 67–69)

An *opera*is a staged drama composed to a *libretto*and sung to continuous (or nearly continuous) music.

1. ***Forerunners***  
   Opera was inspired by ancient Greek tragedy and was influenced by existing musical genres.
   1. Florentine intermedi   
      *Intermedi,*musical interludes between acts of a play, were perhaps the most direct source for opera. They used dialogue, various types of vocal and instrumental music, dances, costumes, scenery, and stage effects.
   2. Pastoral drama   
      The earliest opera composers drew on the subject, style, mythological characters, and use of music and dance in *pastoral dramas*.
   3. Greek tragedy as a model   
      The creators of opera sought to recreate the emotional power of ancient Greek tragedies.
   4. Girolamo Mei   
      *Girolamo Mei*(1519–1594), a Florentine scholar, researched ancient Greek treatises on music and concluded that Greek music consisted of a single melodic line, sung by a soloist or chorus with or without accompaniment.
   5. The Florentine Camerata   
      A group later known as the *Camerata*met at the home of *Giovanni de’ Bardi*(1534–1612) in Florence and discussed a variety of topics, including Mei’s ideas about Greek music. Other important members included *Vincenzo Galilei*(ca. 1520s–1591) and *Giulio Caccini*(1551–1618).
   6. Vincenzo Galilei   
      In his *Dialogo della musica antica et della moderna*(Dialogue on Ancient and Modern Music, 1581), Galilei argued that *monody,*the ancient style of solo singing, could express the emotions of a text better than polyphony.
   7. Ancient versus modern   
      Galilei and Bardi’s generation favored the "ancient" style of solo singing over the "modern" style of polyphony. For the next generation, "modern" was redefined to include the second practice and the new styles of composed monody.
   8. Caccini’s *New Music*  
      Giulio Caccini wrote two types of monody in *Le nuove musiche*(The New Music, 1602): *arias*(airs) and *solo madrigals*(through-composed songs). In the foreword, Caccini described different vocal ornaments, explaining how to use them, and he wrote embellishments singers usually added in performance into the music. **Music: NAWM 67**
2. ***The First Operas***
   1. Corsi’s academy   
      The Camerata moved to Rome and continued under the sponsorship of*Jacopo Corsi* (1561–1602). In 1598, two participants in the academy, poet*Ottaviano Rinuccini*(1562–1621) and composer *Jacopo Peri*(1561–1633), created *Dafne,*the first opera, modeled on Greek plays.

**A Closer Look: Peri’s Recitative**  
Peri’s combination of speech and song provides a dramatic delivery of text.**Music: NAWM 68b**

* 1. *L’Euridice*  
     The first surviving opera was a setting of Rinuccini’s drama *L’Euridice*(the legend of Orpheus and Euridice) by Peri. In the first performance, some music from Caccini’s rival setting of the libretto was substituted for Peri’s. The opera’s story demonstrates music’s power to move the emotions. Caccini’s setting was more lyrical, and Peri’s was more dramatic and varied.
  2. Imitation of speech   
     Imitation of speech in music was important for Peri and Rinuccini because, like other humanists, they both believed that one’s manner of speaking reveals one’s emotions.
  3. Recitative   
     Peri’s new style of vocal music, soon called *recitative,*imitated speech by supporting sustained or stressed syllables with consonant harmonies and freely using consonances and dissonances for syllables that were unstressed or passed over quickly in speech.
  4. Monteverdi’s *Orfeo*  
     Monteverdi’s opera *Orfeo*(1607) was the earliest opera to achieve a permanent place in the repertory. In this work, Monteverdi used different styles of music and drew on a variety of vocal and instrumental resources. While the subject matter was the same as Peri’s *L’Euridice*, the proportions of Monteverdi’s opera were much expanded, and the most modern style was used for dramatic dialogue and impassioned speeches.

**Biography: Claudio Monteverdi**  
Monteverdi wrote only vocal works, and his music was always suited to the text. Born and raised in Cremona, he was hired by the duke of Mantua, later promoted to master of music in the ducal chapel, and composed his first operas (*L’Orfeo*and *L’Arianna*) for the duke’s court. Dissatisfied with his position, Monteverdi became maestro di capella at St. Mark’s in Venice, where he remained until his death. He composed no fewer than 250 madrigals over his career and helped to transform the genre.

* 1. Francesca Caccini   
     Only a few more operas were staged in Florence in the 1620s. The court preferred ballets and intermedi, such as *La liberazione di Ruggiero*(1625), an opera-like blend of ballet and intermedio by *Francesca Caccini*(1587–ca. 1640). She was a singer, a teacher, and one of the most prolific composers of dramatic music of her time.

1. ***Opera in Rome and Venice*(CHWM 196–99, NAWM 70–71)**
   1. Rome   
      In the 1620s, Rome was the center for new developments in opera, whose subject matter was expanded to include religious and comic topics. In Roman opera, there were two types of solo singing, recitative and aria.
   2. Castrati   
      *Castrati*sang the female roles in Roman opera because women were not allowed to sing on stage.
   3. Venetian opera   
      Teatro San Cassiano, the first public opera house, opened to a paying public in Venice in 1637. Venice was ideal for public opera because it had many visitors in Carnival season, wealthy bankers, and a steady audience.
   4. Monteverdi’s *L’incoronazione di Poppea*  
      Monteverdi wrote three operas for Venice, of which two survive: *Il ritorno d’Ulisse*(The Return of Ulysses, 1640) and *L’incoronazione di Poppea*(The Coronation of Poppea, 1642). In *Poppea,*Monteverdi changed styles frequently to reflect the characters and their feelings, using recitative, aria, and *arioso.***Music: NAWM 70**
   5. Pier Francesco Cavalli   
      *Pier Francesco Cavalli* (1602–1676) was a leading composer of opera in Venice, and his works incorporate conventions of the period.
   6. Antonio Cesti   
      *Antonio Cesti*(1623–1669) was another important opera composer of the time who spent much of his career abroad and wrote *Orontea*(1656), one of the most frequently performed operas in the seventeenth century. **Music: NAWM 71b**
   7. Italian opera at midcentury   
      By the middle of the seventeenth century, Italian opera focused on solo singing, had separated recitative and aria, and used varied styles for arias. Unlike the Florentine inventors of opera, Venetian opera composers and their imitators gave music a place of prominence above poetry and drama.