

Baroque Oratorios and Sacred Cantatas

October 13, 2023

- **Oratorio**
 - From Latin *orare*, 'to pray'
 - Named from type of services held at the Congregazione dell'Oratorio, founded by St. Phillip Neri in Counter Reformation Rome
 - characteristics
 - On a sacred topic
 - Chorus plays a central role
 - Presented in concert form, without props or costumes
- **Giacomo Carissimi (1605-1674)**
 - *Maestro di cappella* at the Jesuit Collegium Germanicum in Rome, from age 24 to his death
 - Composed masses, motets, oratorios, in addition to secular chamber cantatas
 - **Listening example: *Jepthe***, oratorio for 6 voices and continuo (Rome, 1648)
 - based on story of Jephtha, in Judges 11:28-38

Athanasius Kircher (Jesuit scholar and polymath) wrote about *Jepthe* in his treatise *Musurgia Universalis* [The Universal Musical Art] (1650):

Giocomo Carissimi, a very excellent and famous composer . . . through his genius and the felicity of his compositions, surpasses all others in moving the minds of listeners to whatever *affection* he wishes. His compositions are truly imbued with the essence and life of the spirit. Among numerous works of great worth, he has composed the dialogue of Jephtha. In this, after victories, triumphs, and ceremonies, Jephtha's daughter approaches him with instruments and dances of all sorts to congratulate him ["Incipite in tympanis, et psallite in cymbalis"]. In a musical style called *recitative*, Carissimi gives expression to the bewildered father with singular genius and piercing tones. Jephtha is suddenly transported from joy to sadness and lamentation as his daughter unexpectedly runs toward him, because the irrevocable decree of his vow [to God] must fall on her for this fateful greeting. Carissimi achieves this transition to the opposite *affection* beautifully with a mutation of mode. To this he adds later a lament for six voices by the daughter's virgin companions, in which they intensely bewail her misfortune ["Plorate filii Israel"]. This is composed with such skill that you would swear that you hear the sobs and moans of the weeping girls.

⇒ The doctrine of affections was the idea that the passions could be represented by outward signs (visible or audible)

Chorus (SSAATB): "Plorate filii Israel"

"Weep, you children of Israel, weep all you virgins, and for Jephtha's only daughter, lament with songs of anguish" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AB5sDA7aztA&t=8s>

- Part 1 - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_TN9VI1vNKM&t=205s
- Part 2 - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-URH_22zagk
- Part 3 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V0GNdPKFFGI>

- **George Frideric Handel (1685-1759)**
 - **Listening example: *La resurrezione***, oratorio (first performed on Easter Sunday, 1708, Rome)
 - Retells the three days between Christ's death and resurrection
 - Libretto by Carlo Sigismondo Capece, court poet to Queen Marie Casimire of Poland, living in Rome
 - Introduction to the characters - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bag9yqXLX-o>
 - Lucifer (bass)

- Angel (soprano castrato)
- Mary Magdalene (soprano) – first sung by soprano Margherita Durastanti
- Mary Cleophas (alto castrato)
- John (tenor)
- o Violins led by Arcangelo Corelli. Other instruments included various strings, viola da gamba, trumpets, trombone, oboes
- o https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NZroYogNftM&list=OLAK5uy_n2HWm6K6su8Oyze8Bl-K4p2f_VCh11xcE&index=4

- **Cantata**

- o From Italian *cantare*, ‘to sing’
- o Vocal piece in multiple movements, accompanied by instruments
- o Could include a choir
- o Could be secular or sacred; Sacred cantatas were especially popular in Lutheran Germany

- **Dietrich Buxtehude (1637-1707)**

- o **Listening example: Membra Jesu Nostrī**, cycle of 7 cantatas (1680)
- o Text: Medieval poem *Salve mundo salutare*, attributed to Arnulf of Louvain, and selection of Bible verses referring to parts of Jesus’ crucified body: feet, knees, hands, side, breast, heart, and face
 - IV *Ad latus* [To the side]
 - Text from Song of Solomon 2:13-14
 - Concerto (SSATB) Surge, amica mea
 “Arise, my love, my beautiful one, and come, my dove in the clefts of the rock, in the hollow of the cliff”
 Aria (S I) “Salve latus salvatoris”
 “Hail, side of the Saviour, in which the honey of sweetness is hidden, in which the power of love is exposed, from which gushes the spring of blood that cleans the dirty hearts”
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J-GF2e0BXxk&t=1900s>

- **Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)**

- o **Listening example: St. Matthew’s Passion**, oratorio (first performance at St. Thomas Church, Lutheran church in Leipzig, Germany, Good Friday Vespers, 1727)
- o Text: Matthew 26-27; libretto by Christian Friedrich Henrici
- o High vocal parts performed by treble choristers
- o Divided in two parts with an interval (intended for a sermon)
- o For soloists, 2 Choruses and 2 orchestras
- o Includes harmonizations of old chorale melodies
 - Listening example: **Chorale: “O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden”**, melody written by Hans Leo Hassler <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kqQtn5-UzxU&t=10s>
- o Listening example: **Aria “Erbarme dich” [Have mercy]**
 - Interview with concertmaster Sato
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ak0Pxyt9Qfw&list=PLecKPCyj4yRMpMP8ErZv3I_PzDN9LIwMy&index=2
 - On the Manuscript:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=53VrYf_8B0I&list=PLecKPCyj4yRMpMP8ErZv3I_PzDN9LIwMy&index=6
 - Full number: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QUOLzacVlrg&t=104s>

- Listening examples: **Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme**, cantata [Awake, calls the voice to us] (1731)
 - Van Veldhoven on BWV 140 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tvB-sJyZEqw>
 - Based on the parable of the wise and foolish virgins (Matthew 25:1-13)
 - 3 vocal soloists (STB), a 4-part choir, horn, 2 oboes, taille, violino piccolo, violins, viola, basso continuo (including bassoon)
 - 7 movements, including chorales, recitative, and duets
 - Duet “**Wenn kömmst du**” [When are you coming?]
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DqZE54i-muE>