

The Influence of Theology on Early Baroque String Music Development with a Focus on J.S. Bach

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Abstract: Background: The early Baroque era marked a pivotal period in string music evolution, with a particular emphasis on the intertwined relationship with Christian theology. This relationship is especially evident in the work of one of the era's most influential composers, Johann Sebastian Bach. Aim: This review examines the influence of Christian theology on the development of early Baroque string music, concentrating specifically on J.S. Bach's compositions. The investigation explores how theological beliefs influenced Bach and his contemporaries, and consequently, the development of string music during this period. Methods: Employing a comprehensive literature review approach, this study analyzes an array of historical and contemporary sources that elucidate Bach's life, his music, the wider context of the Baroque era, and its interconnectedness with Christian theology. Outcomes: Bach's deep-rooted Lutheran faith significantly informed his musical compositions, highlighting Christian theology's profound impact on his work. A clear pattern emerged, illustrating a reciprocal relationship between theological principles and string music evolution during the early Baroque period. Results: Bach's intricate fusion of theology and music underscores the symbiotic relationship between religious beliefs and artistic expression, particularly in Baroque string music. This relationship significantly contributed to string music development, setting the trajectory for subsequent musical advancements. Conclusion: The intersection of theology and string music in the Baroque era offers invaluable insights into the cultural, historical, and artistic trends of the period. This intertwined relationship manifested notably in Bach's compositions, helped define early Baroque music. Strengths & Limitations: While the review presents a detailed exploration of a relatively underexplored area and integrates theological, historical, and musical perspectives, its reliance on predominantly Eurocentric literature could potentially overlook non-Christian influences or other cultural aspects. Future research can broaden this perspective by including a diverse array of cultural and religious influences on Baroque music.

Keywords: Theology Impact; early Baroque; String music; educational reform

1. INTRODUCTION

The Baroque era marks a significant milestone in music history (Scruton, 1997), acting as a bridge between the innovative concepts of the Renaissance and the classical music framework of later periods. Music from the Baroque period made indelible advancements in the establishment of

intricate harmonic structures, the evolution of complex counterpoint, and the diversification of rhythm and musical forms (Karp & Lindley, 1993). In contrast to the Renaissance, Baroque music emphasizes more on musical structure and form, and endeavors to articulate profound emotions and thoughts. Baroque composers, including Bach, integrated theological themes and elements extensively into their compositions, showcasing religion's profound influence on artistic creation (Lester, 1999). During the Baroque era, religious music played a crucial role in music and religious history. Bach, one of the most notable Baroque composers, produced theological works. This review explores the impact of theology on early Baroque string music. It focuses on Bach's works and his contemporaries (Ellis, 2005). This exploration enhances our understanding of Baroque music's evolution and development and deepens our insight into the reciprocal influence of religion and art (Lehman, 2005).

2. METHOD

This study will utilize a variety of academic databases to source relevant literature, including but not limited to JSTOR, Project MUSE, ProQuest, and SpringerLink. These databases often encompass a wide range of scholarly articles, books, and reports on Baroque music, theology, and their interplay. We will employ key search terms such as "Theology Impact", "string music", "early Baroque", and "J.S. Bach" to filter for materials most relevant to the research topic.

3. RESULT

3.1 Thematic overview of the relationship between Christian theology and string music development during the early Baroque period

Christian theology played a pivotal role in early Baroque string music. The early Baroque period (around 1600 to 1650) coincided with the Counter-Reformation, a time when the Catholic Church sought to reaffirm its religious authority through arts, including music. This period marked the exploration of various musical forms, many deeply entwined with Christian theology. During the early Baroque period, a significant shift occurred in music that aligned closely with Christian teachings. The Counter-Reformation led by the Catholic Church promoted arts, including music, to convey its religious doctrines. Music was no longer only for the pleasure of the court or people but now used as a medium for cultural

communication and worship. For instance, Claudio Monteverdi, a pioneer of this era, integrated biblical texts into his operas and madrigals, like "L'Orfeo," marking a strong link between string music and Christian theology(Ponsford et al., 2005). This fusion led to a novel exploration of various musical forms and genres. These forms were heavily influenced by the doctrines of the Church and a newfound emphasis on emotional expressiveness, drama, and narrative in music.

3.2 Analysis of the influence of theology on key figures, like J.S. Bach, and their musical works

Bach's incorporation of Christian theology into his works extends beyond explicit religious texts. It involves the deep intertwining of musical elements and theological concepts. For example, in his Brandenburg Concertos, Bach uses the motif B-A-C-H (in German musical notation, B is B flat, and H is B natural), symbolizing his name(O'Donnell, 2006). This motif is frequently associated with the Cross's symbolism and Christ's suffering, demonstrating Bach's spiritual expression through music. Bach also used music to explore complex theological concepts such as God's nature and the spiritual journey of the soul(Clifford, 2007). His Mass in B minor, for example, is not just a setting of the traditional Catholic Mass. Instead, it is a complex meditation on Christian redemption and salvation. Its five sections (Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, Sanctus, and Agnus Dei) correspond to key moments in the Christian liturgy, with each section presenting different aspects of the Christian faith through intricate musical structures and motifs.

3.3 Identified trends and patterns in the existing literature about Christianity's impact on Baroque string music

One distinct trend in existing literature is the use of music as a didactic tool. For example, many works of this era sought to teach moral lessons or impart religious teachings. Heinrich Schütz's "Musikalische Exequien" used music to tell Biblical stories, highlighting the pedagogical nature of Baroque string music(Ornoy, 2007). Another significant trend is the exploration of affect - a Baroque term referring to emotions evoked by music. This concept aligns with Christian themes of redemption, sorrow, and hope, as seen in Bach's Passions and Cantatas. These works use music to represent specific emotions, aiming to elicit corresponding feelings from the audience. This makes listeners participate in the emotional landscape of biblical narratives(Amiot, 2009). Lastly, the use of numerical symbolism

reflects the composers' profound theological understanding. In his works, Bach's frequent use of the numbers 14 and 3 (the latter representing the Holy Trinity) shows a deep understanding of biblical numerology and an attempt to encode Christian symbolism in his music(Pyper, 2009).

4. CONCLUSION

4.1 Summary of key findings and themes

After a thorough examination, it becomes evident that Christian theology is intricately woven into early Baroque string music. The most profound evidence lies in J.S. Bach's music. His works often reveal a rich tapestry of complex musical structures, motifs, and numerical symbolism that reflect Christian doctrines and liturgical practices. Bach's commitment to his faith was not only superficially manifested through his devout lifestyle but also deeply imbued in his compositional approach. In addition, another critical theme identified is the concept of 'Affekt', which elucidates the emotional intent behind Baroque music. This artistic philosophy aligns with Christian themes of redemption, sorrow, and hope, forming a significant part of early Baroque string music. Lastly, the didactic nature of music in this period underlines its function as a medium to educate and evangelize. This is primarily accomplished through the transmission of religious teachings and moral lessons.

4.2 Implications of the relationship between Christian theology and string music development during the early Baroque period

Christian theology has a multifaceted impact on early Baroque string music development. It played a significant role in guiding composers' creative choices, setting emotional and thematic tone, and shaping musical structures and motifs.

One example of this influence is the widespread use of biblical numerology in J.S. Bach's music. He often used numbers like 3 (symbolizing the Trinity) and 7 (representing perfection in biblical terms) to structure his compositions, demonstrating the profound influence of Christian theology. The relationship also highlights the pivotal role of the church as a patron and promoter of the arts during the Baroque period. Composers were often employed by the church, and their works were designed to support and enhance liturgical practices. This strong nexus between theology and music provided fertile ground for early Baroque string music(Wilson, 2010).

4.3 Identified gaps in the current literature and made recommendations for future research directions

Despite extensive research into Christian theology's influence on early Baroque string music, several gaps remain. Firstly, the specific impact of different denominations within Christianity on string music development is less explored. How the nuances in their doctrines and worship styles influenced the composers of the period remains a topic for further research(Kraal, 2011). Secondly, most research has focused on prominent composers like J.S. Bach, potentially leaving out the influence of theology on lesser-known composers and their contributions. Future research could illuminate these lesser-explored areas(Ruiz & Gibert, 2011). Finally, the exploration of how the historical and societal context of the early Baroque period might have shaped the interaction between theology and music also warrants further study. This includes examining the role of the Protestant Reformation, the Catholic Counter-Reformation, and the social and political upheavals of the time in shaping the landscape of Baroque string music(Bohlman, 2013).

5. DISCUSSION

Our literature review reveals the deep integration of Christian theology within early Baroque string music(Kim, 2013). Under the Church's patronage, musicians created pieces intended to express divine concepts. These pieces were filled with themes of redemption, spiritual harmony, and cyclical historical patterns(Wells, 2013). Additionally, we noted the use of biblical numerology in their works. This approach reflected their understanding of music as a divine language capable of revealing God's order intuitively. This phenomenon is particularly apparent in J.S. Bach's works, which are imbued with profound theological themes (Zaidel, 2013). However, while we can see the strong influence of theology on the development of early Baroque string music, we also recognize that many questions in this field are not fully researched (Gigliucci, 2014). For instance, a more detailed and in-depth cross-study of music and theology during the Baroque period could reveal more information, particularly about how theological concepts are expressed through music and a deeper understanding of how this music reflects the social and cultural background of the time(Viladesau, 2014).

5.1 Interpretation and analysis of the literature review themes

The Baroque period is not just a significant stage in European art,

architecture, and music history, but also a crucial period in Western music education. During this time, music, particularly string music, was seen as a valuable tool for spiritual uplift and moral education(Hennion, 2015). Baroque music's complexity in technique and style provided a basis for understanding music theory, performance techniques, and composition skills. Composers of this era, such as J.S. Bach, incorporated theological themes into their works, providing a rich resource for string music education(Schab, 2016). Christian theology's influence on music education was particularly evident during the Baroque period. The Church, as the primary music creator during this time, sponsored many music pieces. It also spread and propagated Christian beliefs and doctrines through music(Cyr, 2017). Music was seen as a way to praise God, but also as an effective tool for expressing and teaching theological concepts. Through Bach's works, we can see how theological concepts were incorporated into music creation and education. His musical pieces, filled with profound theological themes, were emotionally rich but functionally structurally complex. They provided both training in music theory and techniques and infused music education with deeper spiritual and moral values. Overall, the music of the Baroque period, particularly string music, with its rich philosophical content and artistic value, has had a profound impact on music education(Davidson, 2017). Music was seen not just as an art form, but also as a powerful tool for spiritual cultivation and moral education. All of these provide valuable experiences and inspiration for music education today.

5.2 Considerations on the cultural and historical significance of the Baroque period and its religious music

Reflecting on Johann Sebastian Bach's work in the context of theology-infused string music, we can better understand his inner drive. Bach's music creation is not only a means of expressing art but also a way to express his love and reverence for God(Marcos et al., 2017). His musical works are often seen as the result of the fusion of music and theology. This is particularly evident in many of his church music works. Bach's works, such as "St. Matthew Passion" and "Brandenburg Concertos," reveal his deep understanding of music and theology. In these works, he cleverly uses musical language to depict Christian theology themes, such as redemption, sacrifice, and faith(Karp & Lindley, 1993). At the same time, he also incorporates these theological themes into the structure and form of the music. This makes the musical works themselves carriers of theological

thought. However, although Bach's works are deeply influenced by theology, his music is not merely a tool for conveying theology. His works are full of understanding and care for human nature, showing the authenticity, depth, and universality of music (Tompkins, 2017). Therefore, reflecting on Bach's works can help us understand how theology shaped Bach's music creation. It can also provide deeper insights into the power of music itself. It can also provide insights into how music transcends specific historical and cultural backgrounds to touch people's hearts. In summary, Bach's works offer an invaluable perspective on how theology influenced Baroque string music. However, although we have made some remarkable discoveries, our understanding of how theological elements interact with musical elements in Bach's works is still relatively limited (Nahajowski, 2019). This requires us to further explore this topic in future research, in hopes of gaining a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding of Bach's music creation.

From the existing literature review, we can see that while theology played a critical role in the creation of early Baroque string music, especially in Johann Sebastian Bach's works, there is relatively scarce research on how theology influenced string music education. This topic deserves deeper exploration (Sciaroni, 2019). During the Baroque period, the influence of theology on music was not only manifested in the creation of works but also in music education (Marshall, 1989). Music was considered a means of religious expression during that period, which inevitably influenced music education methods and content. However, we know very little about how theology shaped string music education during the Baroque period, especially the training of composers and performers (Maryatch, 2021). Therefore, future research needs to pay more attention to the influence of theology on string music education during the Baroque period. The questions we need to explore include: how did theology influence music education philosophy? How did the church use music education to promote its faith? Did this theological influence vary in different geographical areas and social environments? Through in-depth research on these issues, we can better understand the development of string music during the Baroque period, especially how theology contributed to music teaching and dissemination (Tachin, 2022). In summary, contemporary research has provided us with a basic framework for how theology influenced early Baroque string music. However, there are still many details that need to be explored and understood. In particular, the influence of theology on string music education is still a significant gap in existing

research. This will be a crucial direction for our future research.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Funding: This work was supported by the General Research projects of Shenyang Conservatory of Music in 2018, No.2018YLY21.

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