Module 6: Baroque

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Baroque Background and Art/Music: A Concise Outline of Information

Counter Reformation—church’s response to bring members back into the fold

Council of Trent—the 19th council of the Roman Catholic Church.

It was a direct response to the protestant reformation. This was due to an outcry of concern by church leaders in Spain and France, who were concerned that the protestant reformation posed a direct threat to the Catholic Church. The church specified current catholic doctrines of salvation, the sacraments, and the bible, and answered all protestant disputes. In addition, the meetings laid out more strict rules for local church leaders (this is the point at which catholic priests are ordered to become celibate), in an attempt to restore order and more centralized control again. The Council of Trent was convened three times between 1545 and 1563, and it would be 300 years before another council convened.

1. The catholic church and repression post-reformation
   1. Oppression of artists
      1. Mannerist painting
      2. Michelangelo
      3. Veronese
2. What is “Baroque”?
   1. As the 17th century began, the Catholic Church struggled to win back the people who were drawn away by the Reformation and the protestant faith.
   2. The church began to wage a campaign which can best be called a “sensual” turn; an appeal not only to intellect but also a great appeal to human emotion and feeling
   3. This increasingly grand and ornate expression became known as “Baroque” style.
   4. A couple of types of “baroque”:
      1. The baroque in Italy
      2. The secular baroque to the north
   5. The center of baroque style was the center of the church: Vatican City, Rome
   6. One of the most notable beginnings of Baroque architecture was at the beginning of the 17th century
      1. Pope Paul V (1605-1621 reign) initiated monumental changes of St. Peter’s cathedral… St. Peter’s represented the “seat” of the catholic faith, the sort of central location and building
      2. He commissioned the leading architect of the day, Carlo Maderno (1556-1629) to design a new façade for the building
      3. The columns “step out” in three progressively projecting planes
      4. The visual impact of the total façade was carefully planned with the intent to leave the viewers in a state of awe
      5. The idea was to create something that looked as though it was created by angels themselves… something unparalleled by other cultures or societies or religions… to show that the catholic church was still dominate and in charge
3. Key Players of the Baroque in Italy
   1. Bernini—key architect
   2. Michelangelo Merisi, known as Caravaggio (1571-1610), very influential painter who was the acknowledged master of light and dark… called the Caravaggio after the town in northern Italy where he was born… his work inspired many followers who were called the Caravaggisti
      1. He arrived in Rome in 1593 and began a career of revolutionary painting and public scandal (he was in trouble with the law many times for lashing out at people and bar fights…etc.)
      2. His paintings often dramatize the moment of faith conversion, because he felt that faith profoundly affects not just how we see the world but how we act in the world
      3. His paintings use a technique called “tenebrism”, which is making use of large areas of dark contrasting sharply with smaller brightly illustrated areas
      4. This technique is in contrast with the popularized technique of the day, called “chiaroscuro”, which involved creating spatial depth and volumetric forms through slight variations of light and dark.
      5. Caravaggio had a profound effect on many artists of his day, including several women artists
      6. Elisabetta Sirani (1638-1665) was the daughter of a painter. She was trained in the refined, classical tradition but she developed a taste for realism like that found in Caravaggio’s works and she also desired to express the wonders of Christian conversion and religious events as though they were everyday events. She painted over 190 works, most of which were for private patrons. She died very young, but had a large following.
      7. Artemisia Gentileschi (1593-1652) was a follower of Sirani who achieved international fame. She was born in Rome and raised by her father who was also a painter and follower of Caravaggio. She had a troubled beginning to her career… at the age of 19 she was raped by her art teacher and mentor, who lied and told her he would marry her. After he didn’t marry her, Artemesia’s father filed a lawsuit against the man for the rape. However, the art teacher denied the claims and made damaging claims against Artemisia in revenge (saying she was not even a good artist, among other things….). There was a very lengthy trial… she was subjected to much scrutiny through it all… he ended up only getting one year in jail. After the trial, though, Artemisia married a fellow artist and moved to Florence to attend the Florentine Academy of Design. Artemisia was most concerned with painting strong female figures from the Bible and mythology.
   3. Music
   4. By the mid-1500’s the catholic church had realized the power of music and singing to convey moral and spiritual ideals
   5. The church rejected the idea of “secular” or non-religious music, but sanctioned music which was deemed to edify god or bring the listener closer to god
   6. Ironically, the church used the secular music of the day as a model for the religious music.
   7. Giovanni Gabrieli(1556-1612)—the main organist at St. Mark’s cathedral in Venice
      1. Responded to the church’s edict to make sacred music more emotionally appealing to the masses
      2. Experimented with sound by re-positioning the organs and the choirs within the cathedral to build a powerful and resonating sound, and to make the sounds complement one another
      3. He also began to compose songs which had no lyrics, and were designed exclusively for wind instruments. He designated a specific instrument for each part of his composition, which is what we now call “orchestration”
      4. He is also the first known composer to indicate dynamics within a piece of music (“piano, forte”)
      5. He also organized his compositions around a “tonic note”, or a central note within a piece, and the end of each composition dissolved into that tonic note which is what gives baroque music a heightened sense of harmonic drama.
4. Claudi Monteverdi— (1567-1643) appointed musical director at st. mark’s in Venice after Gabrieli’s death. Monteverdi proposed a new relationship between text and music, thus inventing opera. (opera is plural for opus, which means “work”). Operas were basically works consisting of many smaller works.
5. Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741)—perfected the form of the instrumental concerto, which was a three-movement secular form of instrumental music. He systemized the structure of the concerto. The first movement was “allegro”, quick and cheerful; the second movement was slower and more expressive, and the third movement was a little livelier and faster than the first. He composed over 600 concertos during his life, including the famous “The Four Seasons”

References:

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