

## Style

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A term denoting manner of discourse, mode of expression; more particularly the manner in which a work of art is executed. In the discussion of music, which is orientated towards relationships rather than meanings, the term raises special difficulties; it may be used to denote music characteristic of an individual composer, of a period, of a geographical area or centre, or of a society or social function.

### 1. Definition.

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Style is manner, mode of expression, type of presentation. For the aesthetician style concerns surface or appearance, though in music appearance and essence are ultimately inseparable. For the historian a style is a distinguishing and ordering concept, both consistent of and denoting generalities; he or she groups examples of music according to similarities between them. A style may be seen as a synthesis of other styles; obvious cases are J.S. Bach's keyboard style or Mozart's operatic style (both comprise distinctive textural styles, distinctive harmonic styles, distinctive melodic styles, etc., and both are fusions of various stylistic traditions). A style also represents a range or series of possibilities defined by a group of particular examples, as in such notions as 'homophonic style' and 'chromatic style'.

Style, a style or styles (or all three) may be seen in any conceptual unit in the realm of music, from the largest to the smallest; music itself is a style of art, and a single note may have stylistic implications according to its instrumentation, pitch and duration. Style, a style or styles may be seen as present in a chord, phrase, section, movement, work, group of works, genre, life's work, period (of any size) and culture. Style manifests itself in characteristic usages of form, texture, harmony, melody, rhythm and ethos; and it is presented by creative personalities, conditioned by historical, social and geographical factors, performing resources and conventions.

### 2. Import of style.

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'Style' derives from the word for a Greek and Roman writing implement (Lat. *stilus*), a tool of communication, the shaper and conditioner of the outward form of a message. While the antithesis of appearance and essence, or style and import, is clear in this original graphical usage, the relationship is more complex than simple antithesis where art is concerned. It is widely accepted (e.g. by Sachs, 1946, and Lippman, *MGG*<sup>1</sup>) that in speaking of the style of an epoch or culture one is treating of import, a substantive communication from a society, which is a significant embodiment of the aspirations and inner life of its people. The same is true of smaller units of artistic endeavour; genres speak of the men who created them and the people who readily received them, and a personal style speaks of the artist's view of life. But in the individual art work other, more intentional messages are also present.

These are not of course messages in the verbal sense. But by the act of creative will a composer asserts something; he makes a statement of some kind. He inherits a usable past and acts by intuitive vision. The product of his vision builds on a stylistic heritage, has a style and import of its own and bequeaths an altered heritage. The stylistic heritage may be seen as general procedures which condition the composer's intuitive choice and invention, the general which limits the particular, the relevant available resource, the essential context of creation. Such notions are embodied in Schoenberg's opposition of style and idea, though this is an opposition which, sadly, Schoenberg took on trust in his book, as in the essay from which its title derives.

The idea works through style. Thus the opening of the *thema regium* in Bach's *Musical Offering* is a stately, measured, disjunct, minor, monophonic melody suitable for fugal treatment, rather than simply five minims C, E $\flat$ , G, A $\flat$ , B $\natural$ . An important part of the significance of this theme is the concatenation of qualities enumerated above, and to some extent the particular idea acts as the medium of style and the play of successive and coincident styles as the substance of the music. But the particular articulation of the stylistic concatenation is also part of the significance; five minims C, E $\flat$ , F, G, B $\natural$  would fit this albeit crude stylistic analysis, but Bach's (or Frederick the Great's) creation is specifically not that. In music the particular and the general embodied therein and articulated thereby together form meaning or significance. They do so because music is stylized. There is no consistent natural meaning in music by relation to natural events, and there is no specific arbitrary meaning as in language. The meaning in music comes from arbitrary order evolved into inherited logic and developed dynamically. A good listener hears both style and utterance, and savours meaning through history. Style is thus the general which surrounds the particular and gives it significance.

### 3. Phenomena of style.

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Brossard, Apel, Bukofzer and Lippman regard style and form as opposed. Style in this sense may be used to describe the shape of details, and form the shape of the whole. The whole, however, is made up of its parts and their relationships, and form may be regarded as a phenomenon of style. Each piece has its own unique form, which controls, relates and comprehends all its details. This form belongs to a class of forms, and classes of forms by characteristic procedures which concentrate on particular parts of musical technique generate and carry distinctive stylistic details. Fugal style and sonata style are familiar terms; variation style and ternary style are also meaningful and important, though not often used as concepts. Forms may also be viewed as taking their beginnings from stylistic details; it was certain features in the details of musical language around 1750 that promoted the evolution and prominence of sonata form. Forms suggest, incorporate, belong to and grow out of specific styles.

In different periods characteristic forms have depended on different elements of musical material in different emphases. Thus in the Ars Nova, for instance, texture was an important formal determinant, whereas in the Classical and Romantic periods forms largely depended on long-range thematic and harmonic thinking. Whatever parameter is used as the chief presenter of form, two general formal principles may be postulated. Forms can be based on continuity or on discontinuity (evolution or contrast, flow or disjunction). The two principles never exist in isolation, and specific forms have characteristic mixtures of them. A basically continuous form like a Bach fugue shows points of articulation and changes

of material, but the overriding impulse is customarily one of evolution and growth rather than contrast and comparison. Discontinuous forms, such as the sectional *formes fixes* of 14th- and 15th-century secular polyphony, have continuity within sections, and no form can avoid temporal sequence. In the 19th century continuous forms, among which sonata form was prime, were complicated by greater contrast elements, and disjunctive forms such as the multi-movement structure of sonata, quartet and symphony, and such as ternary and rondo forms, were complicated by incorporating thematic similarities to bridge the points of articulation. This bridging of articulations in contrast forms had happened before (e.g. in the 15th-century cyclic mass). Repetition is a type of contrast, and varied repetition is, perhaps paradoxically, formally more evolutionary; this may be understood by comparing strophic and variation forms.

Texture is the disposition of the elements of musical argument on the chosen forces; it is sonority, and is conditioned by tone-colour, idiom and compositional technique. The term applies both to simultaneous and to consecutive sounds. As with form, texture is a means of presenting style, and indeed textural features have given rise to stylistic names: monodic style, homophonic style, polyphonic style (stratified or imitative), keyboard style, etc. A good composer will use textural possibilities to shape and enhance his musical statement, and textures will both generate and be generated by the musical material. Texture is sometimes of formal significance, as in the motet (of any period) or the fugue.

The opposing principles of texture are homogeneity and heterogeneity. This begins with the selection of musical forces, which may be, in the terms of the late Renaissance, either a 'whole consort' or a 'broken consort'. A whole consort is a selection of instruments or resources of the same family but different pitches, and a broken consort is a mixture of different instruments or resources. Voices alone are thus a whole consort, but they readily mix with instruments even from earliest polyphonic times to form a broken consort. The texture of a composition may likewise depend on similar constituents (voices or parts which do similar things) or stratified constituents. Stratified texture is a feature of the Franconian motet, whereas homogeneous texture occurs in the 16th-century motet. The opposite principles, as with those of form, are not mutually exclusive: heterogeneous textures blend in the ear and homogeneous textures consist of different parts. Idiomatic usages will link broken consorts and heterogeneous texture, and whole consorts are apt for homogeneous texture.

Harmony as a vehicle for style is mostly an indicator of historical position; it is part of idiom, and its procedures must be regarded in the light of changing conventions. It may be modal, diatonic, chromatic or atonal. Some composers however have stretched and enriched the harmonic resource of their times for expressive purposes (Gesualdo, Wagner and Debussy), and opera composers have often deliberately juxtaposed different harmonic styles for such reasons (*Parsifal* is merely a great example among many that use chromaticism as a symbol for evil, magic or sensuality and diatonicism for goodness, naturalness and innocence). Besides being rhetorical or expressive, or both, harmony also has opposite principles related to these – principles resulting from part-writing or resulting from sonorous imagination. Harmony resulting primarily from part-writing is a characteristic of successive composition, such as occurred in pre- and early Renaissance times, and can well be seen in Machaut's Mass; harmony resulting from sonorous imagination may be seen in some Wagner and Impressionist styles. Again the two principles never exist in

isolation. Successively composed parts were written with some awareness of how they would fit; Wagner's harmonic expression is often through chord juxtapositions, and *Tristan* shows harmonic sensuousness expressed through counterpoint.

Melody is of great importance as a musical feature; it is possible to regard it as the essential condition of music, which is guided by form, supported by harmony and articulated by texture and rhythm. While that is somewhat metaphysical, there is no doubt that the ethos of the generative themes for a tonal piece represents a very large part of the musical statement and impact, or that the characteristic convolutions of an early Renaissance line are a beguiling, immediate and forceful experience. Melody should not be underrated as an element of form; it is not a by-product or necessary evil which the musical accept as a means to higher kinds of statement, nor is it something to be separated from the total form as something better than that. Melody is a prime connective feature in the continuum of audible time, and as such is an important and form-carrying stylistic phenomenon. It consists of a single line of related pitches, but arpeggio-based melodies (especially of the Baroque period) can imply more than one line (or at least strongly suggest their own harmony), contrapuntal forms combine melodies simultaneously, and modern music can exist as a textural sequence (as in Penderecki's *Polymorphia*); in such cases the horizontal expands into and blends with the vertical. Melodic styles may be regular or irregular, flowing or spasmodic, motivic or additive, presentational or developmental, conjunct or disjunct, vocal or instrumental, ornamental or structural, decorated or simple.

Rhythm is the very life-blood of music; it is the term for ordered change, however complex. It is an integral part of formal, textural, harmonic and melodic considerations. Musical rhythm may be viewed as a combination of objective temporal segments (pulse) and emotional sequence (the ebb and flow created by, for instance, discord and resolution, cadence, differentiated melodic and harmonic note values, melodic shape, agogic accents, syncopation). Such a felt experience of time gains significance from its enforced comparison with pulse. Pulses may be more or less strongly grouped in metres, each with its own stylistic suggestions, and the ebb and flow of feeling more or less strongly organized in phrases, periods or sections. Irregularity of metre or phrase structure has a natural tendency to contrast with regularity. Rhythmic styles may favour an even progression, as in much pre-Renaissance and dance music, or the excitement of growth to and recession from points of climax or animation, as in much 19th-century music. On the small scale undifferentiated or disjunct rhythmic styles offer much scope for distinctive utterance. In the rhythmic aspect of style the art forms of music and dance are closest, and the influence of dance on music is an important area of criticism.

These aspects of musical language which present style are united in unique blends by unique expressive purposes. The addition of factors does not explain their relationship, and the factors assume new significance in new relationships and contexts. The expressive purpose may be related to social function, or to a more or less detailed programme (as in the symphonic poem, and any setting of words), or may be more abstract – an expressive purpose to be seen and savoured in purely musical terms. Expressive purposes may also have style names, both general (sacred style, secular style) or more specific (heroic style, reflective style, everyday style, pastoral style); and character descriptions like 'sad', 'desolate', 'happy', 'ebullient', carry stylistic implications.

## 4. Conditioners and dynamics of stylistic differences.

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Personal style is one of the commonest units for discussion in modern music criticism. As a differentiating factor in style it is of variable importance, partly because of the differing attitudes of societies and composers. It is not an important feature in many non-Western musical cultures, in plainchant or in Western folk musics; such repertoires may depend for their formation on individuals and their idiosyncratic performing styles, but in this formation the individual is subordinate to a communal artistic purpose. Personal style may be more important to objective analysis than to the society in which the artist worked, as in German Baroque music, or personal differences may be encouraged by social attitudes so that personal styles become more distinctive, as in the 19th century. The relative importance of personal style is a significant and to some extent distinguishing feature of the Western tradition, and it may be seen with notation as part of the process of comparatively fast development of musical idiom in the West.

Stylistic change is inherent in meaningful creation, at least within the Western tradition, and the personal styles of great composers are hardly ever static; such a composer learns from himself and is constantly adding to his usable past. The amount of change over a lifetime varies according to its length, according to personality and intellectual development, and according to outward cultural and economic circumstances. Normal processes of apprenticeship, maturity and refinement may be largely undisturbed (Palestrina and Brahms), or have imposed on them more dramatic changes affecting style and deriving from a change of ideals (Liszt, Wagner) or changes in external requirements (Bach and Handel).

Styles of composers working at the same time may be compared, like those of Haydn and Mozart or Bruckner and Mahler, and when similarities are drawn questions of epochal style may arise. Such a concept denotes a general range of resource and usage available at any one time; like personal style, epochal style is therefore in a constant state of flux. It is possible however to use the concept stretched over large periods of time because this flux shows differing types of change; some changes have been much more radical or dramatic, or both, than others. Historians from Adler onwards have divided Western musical style at about 1000 and 1600. The change from the monophonic era to the polyphonic was gradual, with polyphony improvised at least as early as the 9th century and plainsong composed even after the 14th. But the development of monophony into polyphony by way of parallelism (a differentiation of texture) to melodic and rhythmic independence of parts, and the evolution of polyphony from an improvised semi-automatic elaboration into a written and composed phenomenon form a fundamental change in the means of expression – a change that justifies grouping in major style areas the music before and after it. Similarly the developments of modality into tonality and of linear into harmonic thought which reached a crux around 1600 are also both gradual and fundamental changes in technique. A further change of this type and magnitude, away from tonality, may be seen around 1900.

In more recent historiography, writers (e.g. Reese, Bukofzer, Blume) have further divided music since 1000 and the epochal styles of *Ars Antiqua*, *Ars Nova*, Renaissance, Baroque, Classical and Romantic have become familiar concepts. Blume has convincingly argued the inner coherence of Classic and Romantic as one stylistic period, and these epochs then depend on significant and radical stylistic change at intervals of

about 150 years (though a detailed chronology of stylistic developments in the 12th century is a matter for conjecture). New styles grow out of suggestions inherent in the old, and any example of a style will have relics of its predecessors and premonitions of its successors.

The changes in the 12th century and in about 1300, 1450, 1600, 1750 and 1900 show consistently new treatments of rhythm; in most cases formal, textural, harmonic and melodic characteristics change too, but rhythmic change is a strong and dramatic initial factor in the formation of these epochal styles. The 12th century saw the adoption of modal rhythm as a central feature; the beginning of the Ars Nova depends on increased importance of duple rhythm and syncopation, and that of the Renaissance on the homogenization of the rhythmic constituents of polyphonic texture and an awareness of the rhythm of growth. The Baroque begins with the new affective rhythm of monody, the continuo madrigal and Frescobaldi's toccatas; the Classical period begins with a new interest in phrase structure and a greater diversity of note values within melodies; and the modern period begins with the rhythmic revitalizations of Bartók and Stravinsky.

The epochal styles are however not always best characterized in rhythmic terms; the Baroque for instance is primarily the age of the continuo, the Classic and Romantic period the age of tonality as a large-scale structural force, the modern era the age of alternatives to tonality and triadic harmony. The aphoristic characterization of each period however is always problematic, for periods themselves include much change; styles begin, grow and die. Initially, new techniques of expression are explored and adjusted to by composers learning, like children, the possibilities. These techniques are incorporated into suitable forms which become established in a phase of consolidation, which may be seen in terms of a balance between controlled development of style and newness of import. Consolidation leads to refinement and complication, and the styles of composers at the end of epochs, such as Bach, Brahms and Wagner, are nothing if not complex; sometimes this phase includes what are after regarded as overripe modes of expression, like the elaborations of Petrus da Cruce, Gesualdo and Reger.

Style is greatly conditioned by the expectations and requirements of an audience or other patrons of composers, especially in matters of genre and ethos. The genres of mass, opera and chamber music become popular with composers partly because of popular demand, and they carry their own stylistic characteristics. Associated ethos, such as the expression of religious emotions in church, of theatrical emotions in opera and of refinement in the chamber are also the result of social expectations and taste. Sometimes more than acceptability and expectation is involved; there is a functional role and demand for military music, and the requirements of Soviet realism have a quasi-legal force. Stylistic crossovers, such as Mahler's use of military music in a symphony or Strauss's use of chamber music in an opera (*Capriccio*), have denotive value.

Geographical location is a strong conditioner of style, and can involve particular social pressures which exist only in certain places: examples are the birth of opera in Italy, the requirements of the 17th-century French court, and Russian realism of both the 19th and 20th centuries. Geographical differences are important in cultural development because of difficulties of communication, and local styles may grow up in a city (such as Mannheim or Vienna), a region (as with the various German organ schools of the middle Baroque), a country or a continent. The folk culture of a country often has strong influences on style (especially in the 19th century), and these influences may be consciously enhanced by composers as a

means of national assertion. Language also has a decisive effect on national styles, as Abraham has shown in his fascinating comparison of Italian and Czech styles (1974, chap.4). A preference of southern races for melody and of northern races for the greater technical intricacies of counterpoint has been remarked, and is attributed to interactions of climate, religion, personality and language. Sometimes styles become international, as with late Renaissance Netherlandish style, Baroque Italian opera, or early 19th-century Germanic style. The interaction of styles born in distinct localities is an absorbing study. The mutual influence of Du Fay and Dunstaple and the ways in which Dunstaple differs from English composers working in England show some of the intricacy of the issues. Historical accidents of communication can have far-reaching consequences for the evolution of musical style; Agincourt, spreading the English style on the Continent at a time when Renaissance style was in embryo, and the marriage of Philip II of Spain, bringing the Iberian keyboard variation to England in time for the English virginalists to develop, have artistic as well as political significance.

The resources of performance are important formative influences on style, and Parry (1911) used the relationship between resources and utterance as the starting-point for and main feature of a definition of style. Characteristic sounds are a direct element of style, while the techniques of performing on specific resources, with attendant idiomatic proclivities and possibilities, influence melody, rhythm and texture. Conventions in the grouping of resources and in performing practice underlie various distinctive personal, epochal, social and geographic styles. Each resource has its own especially suitable forms of expression. Voices are good at sustained, conjunct music, while instruments are suited to agility and disjunction. The violin has a capacity for wide-ranging melody, as Corelli exploited, and very high tessitura, as Romantic composers found; the organ pedals particularly require figures involving the use of alternate feet, giving rise to patterns that became a feature of late Baroque German organ music.

Instruments come, develop and go, and the techniques of playing them develop (usually in the direction of greater facility and complication, but not always, as may be seen from horn and trumpet technique in the 18th century); such changes are integral in determining style. Idioms from one instrument pass into other usages, as did the vocal ornaments of the late Renaissance into the violin repertory and the lute style of the early Baroque into keyboard resource.

## 5. Stylistic awareness.

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Composers have always been aware of stylistic differences, as may easily be seen from any cursory examination of Western music and its supporting body of theoretical literature. That is why plainchant composers produced alleluia melodies different from settings of the Agnus Dei, why Du Fay wrote chansons in treble-dominated style and discant-tenor style, and why Liszt wrote differently for the piano and for the orchestra. Theorists and critics too have been aware of stylistic distinctions. Musical style in Greece was a subject for philosophers because of the ethic and educative powers of different styles; Johannes de Garlandia (13th century) distinguished between discant, copula and organum, and Johannes de Grocheo (c1300) between *musica vulgaris*, *musica composita* or *mensurata* and *musica ecclesiastica*. It was however in the late Renaissance and early Baroque that theoretical discussion of style became an important area of literary production; indeed the word 'style' enters the vocabulary of music commentary at this time.



Monteverdi (like Philippe de Vitry before him and C.P.E. Bach after him) was one of the great composers who was also an important theorist. He drew distinctions between *prima pratica* (really late Renaissance styles) and *seconda pratica* (the new affective styles of the early Baroque), and between *stile concitato*, *molle* and *temperato* (in the preface to the eighth book of madrigals, 1638); he divided secular music into *teatrale*, *da camera* and *da ballo*. The distinction between the two practices continued in Doni (*Compendio*, 1635), who spoke of *stile antico* and *stile moderno*, and in Christoph Bernhard (*Tractatus compositionis augmentatus*, c1657), who spoke of *contrapunctus gravis* or *stylus antiquus* and *contrapunctus luxurians* or *stylus modernus*. Bernhard also introduced the concepts of ‘Figurenlehre’ and ‘Affektenlehre’, which combine stylistic details and expressive purposes and which are so important for the high Baroque aesthetic. Kircher (*Musurgia universalis*, 1650) synthesized a stylistic system that found much popularity and acceptance, based on differences of musical purpose, genre, personality, location and mood. Style dependent on personality and temperament Kircher called *stylus impressus*, style dependent on technique and ‘Affekt’ *stylus expressus*; further he distinguished *stylus ecclesiasticus*, *canonicus*, *motecticus*, *phantasticus*, *madrigalescus*, *melismaticus*, *choriacus sive theatralis* and *symphonicus*. Brossard (1703) and J.G. Walther (1732) followed him. The important basic stylistic classification of the late Baroque period however was *stylus ecclesiasticus*, *stylus cubicularis* and *stylus scenicus*. This appeared first in Marco Scacchi (*Breve discorso sopra la musica moderna*, 1649) and was continued by Berardi (*Ragionamenti musicali*, 1681) and Mattheson (*Das beschützte Orchestre*, 1717; *Der vollkommene Capellmeister*, 1739; *Grundlage einer Ehren-Pforte*, 1740). Mattheson also spoke of national styles (‘welschen und frantzösischen’) to which Scheibe (*Critische Musikus*, 1745) added performing practice as a stylistic phenomenon; they followed Bach, Telemann, Rameau and others who composed music in specific, and specified, national or local styles. The differences between and the relative merits of the French and Italian styles of composition and performance, in particular, were an important part of 18th-century musical consciousness.

In the Classical and Romantic periods the fashion for stylistic theory abated, but by the end of the 19th century the fundamental concerns of modern musicology as a discipline of cultural history were well established. Adler (1855–1941) described music history as the history of style, and the theory of style as an epochal concept was subsequently treated of by Bücken, Mies, Riemann, Handschin, Gurlitt and Schering. Epochal names were taken from art history and from literature. Major modern achievements in epochal historiography are the Oxford History of Music and the Norton series including work by Reese, Bukofzer and Einstein. Studies of personal styles, beginning with work by Baini and Winterfeld in the early 19th century, were continued in the 20th by such as Jeppesen’s study of Palestrina (1922) and Rosen’s of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven (1971). The study of folk cultures was an important aspect of 19th-century musicology and was expanded in the 20th century by the discipline of ethnomusicology. Analysis of the style of examples of music is basic to all these branches of musicology; such analysis has become more justified in its own right since the work of Schenker and Tovey. (For a discussion of style analysis, see Analysis §II 5..) Stylistic criticism is the means of both cultural history and the human response to an art work. It distinguishes the blend and origin of styles as they are presented in the individual art work, which is a fixing or crisis of tradition. A work cannot properly be appreciated or studied in isolation; neither can stylistic evolution and trends be distinguished without a thorough understanding of individual examples. By the application of stylistic questions one may arrive at a deeper view of musical utterance, an intellectual interpretation of music which enriches the response to it.



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