

Suggested paper topics for *Music of the Baroque* by David Schulenberg, third edition (Oxford University Press, 2013)

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Responses to boxes (sidebars) in the textbook

The following assignments are based primarily on boxes or sidebars on social and aesthetic issues that have been added for the third edition of the textbook. These new boxes focus on aspects of the cultural context for certain works and their performance.

Gender: Boxes 5.1 (Women and music) and 13.1 (Vivaldi and the *ospedali*)

“Meaning” in music: Boxes 6.3 (French overtures) and 11.2 (Couperin's *Pièces*)

Castratos: Box 8.2 (Burney on Farinelli)

Colonialism and ethnicity: Box 8.7 (Europeans and Americans)

Bach in context: Boxes 9.2 (Bach, Politics, and Religion) and 13.2 (Scheibe on Bach)

Comparison of settings of the same motet or madrigal text by different composers

Composers of the late Renaissance and Baroque often wrote musical settings of favorite texts that had been previously set to music by other composers. Most of the motets and madrigals in our textbook set texts that were also used in other musical compositions. In this paper you will compare one of the settings from the textbook with another setting of the same text:

Text 1: *Dum complerentur*

Setting in textbook by: Palestrina

Alternate setting: also by Palestrina, but in four voices instead of six

Note: Palestrina also composed a parody mass, based on the six-part motet Dum complerentur.

Text 2: *Timor et tremor*

Setting in textbook by: Lassus

Alternate setting by: Giovanni Gabrieli

Text 3: *Luci serene*

Setting in textbook by: Monteverdi

Alternate setting by: Gesualdo

Text 4: *Sfogava con le stelle*

Setting in textbook by: Caccini

Alternate setting by: Monteverdi

You will first have to choose one of the four texts listed above, then find a score and a recording of the alternate setting (for scores, start by looking in the composer work-lists in *Grove*).

Your comparison might focus on two aspects of each work: (1) the musical setting and (2) the use of musical rhetoric. Musical “setting” includes such things as the ensemble for which the work is written (how many and what types of voices and instruments), the texture, the presence or absence of virtuoso writing, and other aspects of the music. Musical rhetoric involves the relationships between the music and the text (see textbook, Box 2.1).

Be sure to mention points of similarity as well as points of difference between the two works. You might also consider which of the two settings is more effective, or whether each composer has chosen to bring out different aspects of the text.

Whichever option you select, be sure to cite specific passages from both works. To cite a passage, identify the measure number and the voice or part to which you are referring, as well as the word or phrase from the text that is being sung at that point (refer to the words in the original language). For this paper it is not necessary to do any outside reading or research, but if you do use material from outside sources you must cite the latter, using footnotes in an acceptable format.

Early Baroque musical drama

In this paper you will examine a selection of your choice from one of the stage works by Monteverdi discussed in the textbook: *Orfeo*, the *Combattimento*, and *Poppea*. Please select any one of the following segments from these works (only *Orfeo* is included in the anthology):

Orfeo: messenger scene (Selection 5b, mm. 15–152)

Orfeo: Orfeo's lament and following chorus (selection 5b, mm. 171–247)

Combattimento: the invocation of Night (“Notte, che nel profondo oscuro seno” to “Splenda del fosco tuo l'alta memoria,” mm. 73–133)

Combattimento: the second battle and the fatal wounding of Clorinda (“Torna l'ira nei cori e li trasporta” to “Morirsi e' l'piè le manca egro e languente,” mm. 299–340)

Poppea: Nero's debate with Seneca (Act 1, scene 9)

Poppea: the death of Seneca (Act 2, scene 3)

The object of this paper is to discover not only how Monteverdi treats individual words or lines of poetry, but also how he shapes an entire scene through changes in the musical style, texture, or pacing. You might use the list of items below as an outline for your paper. Items 2–4 include numerous questions, but you need not address all of them. Throughout the paper, be sure to refer to specific examples in the musical score, and always mention the measure number(s) and the words in the Italian text for each musical passage that you discuss.

1. Statement of topic. Identify the composer, the work, and the performing forces (voices and instruments for which it is written). Give an approximate date of composition and any other essential historical background. Name the author of the poetic text and give crucial information about the latter.

2. Plot and action. What portion of the work are you analyzing? In this portion of the work, where does the action take place; which characters are involved? What crucial events take place?

3. Music: general description. Does this portion of the work comprise distinct sections? What genre does each section represent (recitative, aria, etc.)? What is the scoring of each section (which voices and instruments participate)? Does any section fall into a standard form, such as ABA (da capo) form or strophic aria form?

4. Music and text. Can you relate anything in the music to individual words or phrases in the text, or to particular events in the action? For example, does the music employ instances of word painting, long melismas, or unusual harmonies? On what words do those devices fall? Do changes in scoring, tonality (key), meter, or the style of the vocal writing accompany events in the action? Are there any particularly striking moments in the music that merit detailed description?

Comparative analysis

The distinction between French and Italian style is crucial for understanding Baroque music. In this paper you will compare examples of vocal or instrumental works from the two traditions, considering the differences between French and Italian approaches to musical style. Your approach will depend on whether you choose vocal or instrumental works. For a summary of distinctions between French and Italian style, see Box 8.1 in the textbook. This box focuses on opera, but most of the items listed apply to other types of music as well.

Option 1: vocal. Compare an aria from an Italian-style work of the later Baroque with a substantial air or aria-like passage from a contemporary French-style work. Italian-style arias are those in the works by Alessandro Scarlatti, Handel (both opera and oratorio), and Bach (cantata). Comparable passages in the French style can be found in the works by Lully, Charpentier, and Rameau. You may also select works not discussed in the textbook.

You might first identify several specifically Italian and French features, respectively, in each work. Consider such elements of style as:

- musical form
- expressive treatment of the text
- presence or absence of ornament signs and embellishments
- special features of the vocal writing.
- use of instruments

You might conclude by giving your judgement of the overall success of each selection in conveying the emotions and dramatic action (if any) inherent in the text.

Option 2: instrumental. Compare two instrumental compositions belonging to the same or similar genres. You might select two sonatas, two suites, two concertos or sinfonias, or two fugues. In the case of multi-movement works, you need not consider all movements. You may include one work that is not from the syllabus for this course.

Your discussion should include, but should not be limited to, your identification of French and Italian characteristics within each work, bearing in mind that even a work in an Italian genre such as the sonata or the concerto can contain elements of French style, such as a dance rhythm.

Other topics to consider include:

- form
- harmony and modulation
- presence or absence of ornament signs and embellishments
- the use of particular instrumental devices or techniques

You might conclude by giving your evaluation of how successfully each work achieves what you consider to be its expressive or dramatic goals.

Fugue analysis

In this assignment you will analyze the fugue in B-flat major (no. 21) from Part 1 of J. S. Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier*. You should begin by printing two copies of the score, one for your own use and one to hand in as described below. You will be turning in (1) a marked copy of the score, (2) a diagram or chart showing the form of the piece, and (3) a commentary three double-spaced pages in length. If you are unsure of the meaning of any terms used in this assignment, please review Box 11.1 in the textbook.

1. Begin by listening to the piece while following the score. Then

(a) mark in the score all complete entries of the subject: place brackets or parentheses at the beginning and end of each statement. Label each such statement with the name of the voice (soprano, alto, or bass) and the key in which it occurs

(b) Next, do the same for any countersubject(s), labeling each statement of the first countersubject with the numeral 1, the second with 2, and so on.

(c) When you are finished, you may discover that there are passages from which the subject is absent. If these passages are more than a measure or two in length, label them as episodes.

(d) Finally, mark each cadence by drawing an arrow from the dominant note to the tonic note in the bass line where each cadence occurs. Label each cadence with an upper- or lowercase letter to indicate the key (major or minor) at that point in the piece.

2. Next, make a chart comparable to the one given in the textbook for the fugue in G (Table 11.2). Use the same format and abbreviations employed in the textbook. You may find that the present fugue has special features not found in the one in G; if so, feel free to devise your own way of illustrating these features in your chart.

3. Finally, write a three-page commentary explaining your chart. Begin by describing the subject and any countersubject(s) or other recurring thematic material in the work. Be sure to mention the location in the score of each item that you describe: identify both the measure number and the voice (e.g., soprano, bass) in which it occurs.

Also please explain the structure of the fugue as depicted in your chart. Mention:

the number of expositions and episodes

the pattern of the modulations

and any special features, such as:

second subjects

multiple countersubjects

inversions of any subject or countersubject

strettos

sequences based on motives drawn from the subject or countersubject.

Many Bach fugues contain an episode that is restated several times. Please identify by measure number any recurring episodes in this fugue. Also describe any alterations that the episode undergoes (for example, transposition).

Concert report

A “concert report” is based on one major work that you have heard in a live performance. It includes a historical introduction about the work and its composer; an analysis of the music; and a review of the performance. In place of a single major work, such as a cantata or a concerto, you may select a group of shorter compositions performed together. If the work you have chosen is very long, such as an opera, you should select a single portion containing fifteen to twenty-five minutes of music. In an opera or oratorio, a series of scenes containing three or four arias would be appropriate.

You will probably find it helpful to get to know the work *prior* to attending the performance.

This means:

- get a score and look it over
- if reporting on a vocal work, also get the text or libretto (including translation) and read it, as well as any other relevant verbal material (such as a list of characters, or a synopsis)
- listen several times to a recording of the work, following the score and libretto (if any).

You will also need to gather information about the work and its composer. The best place to begin is likely to be the *Grove* article about the composer (don't overlook the bibliography and list of works included in most *Grove* articles). You should also look in the bibliography of the textbook for relevant items, starting in the section “Composers and Their Works.”

The paper should be between three and five double-spaced pages in length, not counting bibliography, notes, and any music examples. It should include, but not be limited to, the following:

Basic identification and description of the music:

- full name of the composer
- complete title of work, including its instrumentation and/or voices
- date, time, and place of performance; name(s) of performer(s)

Background information about the music

- essential biographical information about the composer
- essential historical information about the music

Analysis of the music

- identify its genre
- describe its overall form and the forms of individual movements
- analyze any special features, great moments, etc.

Description and critique of the performance

- special or unusual aspects of the performance
- comparison with recording(s), if available
- what was effective or ineffective, moving or dull (etc.) about the performance

Comparison of different performances of a work

Among the major themes of this textbook are the instruments and the historical performance practices used in the music that we have studied. Today, this music is often given in what are often described as historically informed performances, including reconstructions of historical instruments and performance practices. Other performances, especially of music from the later Baroque, continue to employ present-day instruments and approaches to performance.

For this assignment, find two recorded performances of a single work, such as a Bach cantata or a Handel opera. One performance should employ “original,” “historical,” or “period” instruments and practices; the other should employ a “modern” performance approach. First identify differences between the two performances in objective terms: the instruments used, the numbers and types of performers (including chorus members, if any), any differences in the choice or ordering of movements or sections of the work. Then identify differences in the basic elements of interpretation: the tempo used in each movement; the use or addition of specific ornaments, embellishments, or cadenzas; or the use of dynamics, rubato (variations in tempo), and other expressive devices. In identifying each difference, be sure to refer to specific movements, citing exact vocal or instrumental parts and measure numbers where appropriate.

Finally, consider the overall effect of each performance. Are there differences in the expressive character of the two performances? Is one performance more moving, more dramatic, or more exciting than the other? If there is something that you find unappealing or unsuccessful about one performance, is it possible to explain what the performer(s) had in mind or why they chose to perform the work in that particular way?

Successful completion of this assignment is likely to require that you familiarize yourself with some aspects of historical instruments and performance practices. Basic information on these topics is available in the textbook, in the commentaries to scores in the anthology, and in the readings listed under “Performance Practice and Organology” in the bibliography. Be sure to cite the source of any information that you use on these topics in a properly formatted footnote or endnote.

Performance project

In this project you will prepare a presentation about any significant Baroque work. The presentation may be either a performance of the work or a brief talk about its performance. Presentations may be by individuals or by groups. Each presentation will be followed by discussion in which any member of the class may contribute.

The work chosen need not be from the syllabus, but it should have been composed between 1600 and 1750. It may be a work you are studying as a performer or as a member of an ensemble. Two or more students may participate together in a presentation; you are encouraged to form groups for this purpose. The work chosen for this project may also be the subject of one of your papers for this course. Information to get you started on this project can be found in many of the commentaries that follow scores in the anthology, and in books listed in the section of the textbook's bibliography headed "Performance Practice and Organology."

What we are looking for is not a perfect performance but rather a presentation showing thoughtful consideration of some of the issues that arise when performing a Baroque work.

These issues include (but are not limited to):

- finding a reliable edition of the music
- scoring: choice of instrument(s) and/or type and number of voices
- choosing an appropriate tempo for each section or movement
- realizing the figured bass, if any
- how to realize any ornament signs
- what unwritten ornaments and embellishments, if any, to add
- rhythmic conventions
- appropriate instrumental and vocal techniques (bowing, articulation, vibrato, etc.).

If you choose to include your own performance in your presentation, the latter should consist of:

- (1) performance of the work
- (2) discussion of specific questions of performance that arose in your study or rehearsal of the work, such as:
 - how to perform a particular ornament
 - what tempo to use
 - what instruments or voices to use.

Be prepared to demonstrate alternative solutions to each question. Also, be sure to refer to at least one recording or some written source that illustrates a solution to the problem (many editions include discussions of such matters).

If you choose not to do a performance, please give a verbal presentation in which you identify at least three specific problems or questions concerning the performance of the work. Be sure to include your own suggestions as to how to solve these questions. You will need to illustrate your presentation with examples from a score or selections from a recording of the work (preferably both). It would be especially effective if you could compare different recordings of the work, showing how different performers have dealt with the performance issues that you discuss.

Whether or not your presentation includes a performance, plan on taking a total of fifteen

minutes to twenty minutes, including the performance (if any). You will need to plan your verbal comments ahead of time, choosing your examples carefully and speaking precisely and to the point. Groups will want to work out ahead of time which individual member addresses which issues. It will help to make an outline of your presentation and distribute it to all group members and to the class!

Gender and Baroque music

Baroque musicians and their audiences took it for granted that men and women played specified roles in both life and music. Men dominated virtually every institution, public and private. Women composers were rare, and at certain times and places women did not perform publicly.

The study of gender includes examining not only how people's lives were influenced by social constructions of sex, but also how music and other artforms depicted and even defined gender. Within the textbook, Box 5.1 (Women and music) and Box 13.1 (Vivaldi and the Venetian *ospedali*) explore certain aspects of gender and the roles of the sexes in the Baroque. These boxes focus on the roles of women in Baroque Venice, but it would also be possible to consider the ways in which men's lives were defined or represented artistically during the same period, in Italy or elsewhere.

After reading both boxes, write a short research paper of three to five double-spaced pages on some of the historical, biographical, or musical questions listed below. Be sure to read and cite appropriate sources, including those in *Grove* and those listed in the bibliography under "Women in music" and under the names of individual composers.

Historical questions: when and where were women most active as composers during the Baroque? as performers? Were they limited to particular types of music? why?

What sort of training did professional male performers and composers typically receive? Could women receive comparable training? if not, how did women such as Strozzi and Jacquet de La Guerre learn their trade?

What views or attitudes did men hold toward women musicians? how did they express those views? why?

Biographical questions: focusing on a woman composer or performer other than Strozzi and Jacquet, provide an overview of her life and works. How did her career compare with that of Strozzi or Jacquet? What aspects of her family, training, or place and time of origin account for differences between her life and works and theirs?

Questions about musical compositions: Does the music written by women composers in the Baroque reflect their own gender in any way? does any music by men?

How are male and female characters depicted musically in any given dramatic work, such as *Orfeo*, *Calisto*, *Armide*, or *Orlando*? Do differences in their musical characterization reflect their gender or do they reflect other aspects of who they are?

“Meaning” in Baroque music

How can music, especially instrumental music, mean anything? To put it another way, what does it mean to say (as one often hears) that a French overture by Lully represents the monarchy of King Louis XIV, or that Couperin depicted himself in his harpsichord piece “La Couperin”?

Such questions are explored in Box 6.3 (French overtures and royalty) and Box 11.2 (Couperin's *Pièces*). Focusing on one or the other topic, write a paper of three to five double-spaced pages that explores the possible ways in which “royalty” or “character” might be represented or depicted in an instrumental composition.

For “royalty,” you might begin by identifying three to five examples of French overtures and related pieces. All should contain the persistent dotted rhythm that is the most recognizable feature of the French overture. Some may be from operas or other theatrical works; others may be from purely instrumental compositions (such as the quartet by Telemann mentioned in chapter 14).

First, clearly describe the musical features of each work that identify it as an overture. Then consider possible ways in which each work might have had some association with royalty: is it from a dramatic work that features a king or other noble character? was the work dedicated to a real king or nobleman? was it performed for or by such a person? Also consider the expressive character of the music: is it “noble” in some concrete way? or are there other possible interpretations of what the music means or expresses?

For “character,” consider carefully what Couperin claimed in writing about his own *pièces de clavecin*. What exactly could he have meant in saying that his pieces “represent a type of portrait”? He asks to be “excused from explaining” how his musical “ideas” represent a person or a thing, but in this paper you must try to explain just that.

Focusing on a single piece by Couperin, first explain the possible significance of its title, bearing in mind that the latter may have several meanings. Then discuss specific elements of the music that could relate to those meanings: its tempo and meter, individual motives, any recurring rhythmic patterns (especially those that might signify a particular French dance). Be sure also to identify any changes or surprises that occur in the course of the piece: how might those reflect on the meaning of the title?

Castratos

The castrato phenomenon holds an inevitable fascination today, as it must have done during the Baroque as well. Sexual identity is central to how we perceive ourselves, yet the anomalous gender of the castrato is inherently puzzling. Today we wonder how audiences could have accepted such a person as representing on stage the great heroes of ancient Greek and Roman history. Yet they did, and in Box 8.2 the English writer Charles Burney expresses both his curiosity about castratos in general and his admiration for one castrato singer in particular.

The textbook mentions several other castrato singers as well. Select one of these and write a research paper on that singer and his work (both roles and compositions, if any). You might focus on primarily biographical or primarily musical issues. For information about castratos, look first in *Grove*, which includes articles about a number of castrato singers and composers, and about the castrato phenomenon in general. You might also look in the bibliography under “Baroque vocal technique.”

Biographical issues: Trace the career of the person, focusing on training, major roles, and compositions (if any). Questions to ask: how was the person's career shaped by his being a castrato? what other musicians did he influence? how was he seen by his contemporaries?

Musical issues: What works did this singer perform or compose? In these works (or in contemporary works of a similar type), do the castrato parts differ in any distinct ways from parts for other voice types? What is the range of each part for any particular castrato—understanding “range” in both the literal sense (tessitura) but also in the sense of emotional range and variety of styles or expressive character? If we have any examples of musical embellishments or cadenzas (as we do from Farinelli), how do these alter the original version of the part? do they call for any unusual types of vocal ability or technique?

Colonialism and ethnicity

By the Baroque era, the major European states held long-established colonies not only in North and South America but in parts of Asia and Africa. Educated Europeans were aware of the great diversity of peoples and cultures around the globe. Yet their views on culture and ethnicity remained narrow by modern standards and were shaped by what we would consider inaccurate stereotypes. Most applied stereotypical views even to themselves, supposing, for example, that the French were cool and calculating whereas a Spaniard was fiery and forthright.

Box 8.7 examines how colonialism and ethnicity are reflected in the “new” entrée (the fourth act) of Rameau's *Les indes galantes*. In this paper, you will examine another work for traces of Baroque views on foreign peoples and cultures. Possible works to examine include:

Lully, *Armide*

Rameau, “L'Egyptienne” and the first three entrées of *Les indes galantes*

Couperin, *Les nations* (a set of trio sonatas)

Vivaldi, *Motezuma*

Graun, *Montezuma*

You might begin by identifying the ethnic group or groups represented or depicted in the work. Be sure to explain the political status of the group—whether a European power, an independent non-European nation, or a colonized people. If it is a vocal work, also consider how the group or individual members of the group are described in the text. Are they treated sympathetically? do they reveal good or bad qualities through their words or deeds?

In some cases, the music may incorporate real or imagined elements borrowed from the foreign culture: distinctive rhythmic patterns (especially in dances), unusual melodic or harmonic progressions, special instrumentation. Be sure to identify these. Be on the lookout as well for more subtle ways in which a “foreign” person or group might have been characterized for a particular audience. You may find, however, that the music makes no substantial departure from the composer's normal style—but that too could be significant (if so, explain why!).

Bach in context

Except for a single year early in his career, Bach spent his entire life in monarchies: entities ruled by a single prince, duke, or other authoritarian ruler. Yet his time also saw the emergence of modern forms of public expression, including some of the first serious music criticism. Bach himself was the target of one famous example of the latter.

In this paper you will explore some aspect of Bach's relationship to the world in which he lived. Boxes 9.2 and 13.2 illustrate two examples of that relationship, one centering on politics and religion, the other on contemporary music criticism. Select one of those topics for deeper investigation. The Bach section of the bibliography (under "Composers and Their Works") lists a number of sources useful for exploring either topic.

Politics and religion. As Box 9.2 explains, politics and religion were inseparable for Bach's contemporaries. The text of any Bach church work could be examined for passages that have political as well as religious implications. You might do so in our work (Cantata 127) or another, then consider how that passage is set to music. (For example, the box mentions the use of trumpet calls to accompany words attributed to Jesus.) Can you find similar textual or musical passages in other works by Bach? Does the similarity have any deeper significance?

Music criticism. Bach's critic Scheibe today is often viewed as a blockhead who simply didn't "get" Bach's music. Yet Scheibe was respected in his day, and his views on Bach were shared by most of the relatively small number of people who knew the latter's music. Examine Scheibe's complete account in *The Bach Reader* as well as the reply by Birnbaum. Which writer gets things right? which writer gets things wrong? Why is or isn't Birnbaum's reply an effective response to Scheibe's criticism? Be sure to cite specific passages in the works of both writers, as well as in Bach's compositions.