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Baroque Music

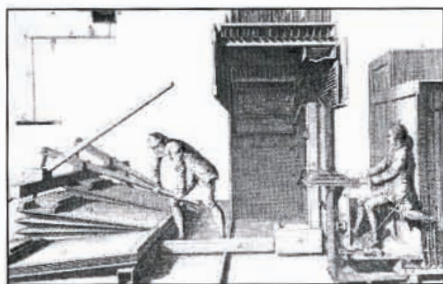
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Baroque keyboard instruments

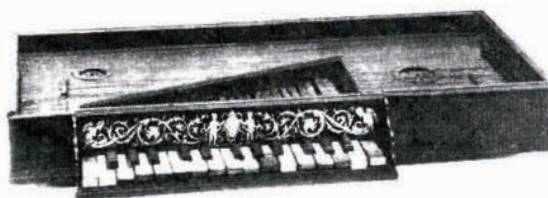


Two people are needed to play the organ, one on the keyboard and a second working the bellows.

The keyboard instruments that were available to musicians in the Baroque period were the organ, the clavichord and the members of the harpsichord family. The members of the harpsichord family all produce sound the same way: when the player strikes a key, the strings are plucked. No matter how hard you hit the keys on the harpsichord, the plucked string always sounds the same way. This is very different from the piano, in which the string is struck by a padded hammer when the key is pressed. The pianist can control the loudness and softness by controlling the force with which the keys are struck. The pianoforte, the ancestor of the piano, was invented during the Baroque period but it did not really gain acceptance until afterwards.

Italian clavichord, around 1600

The clavichord was very popular with Baroque musicians, but its sound was very soft, which made it inappropriate for accompanying other instruments for concerts.



Pianoforte made by Bartholomeo Cristofori in Italy in 1720

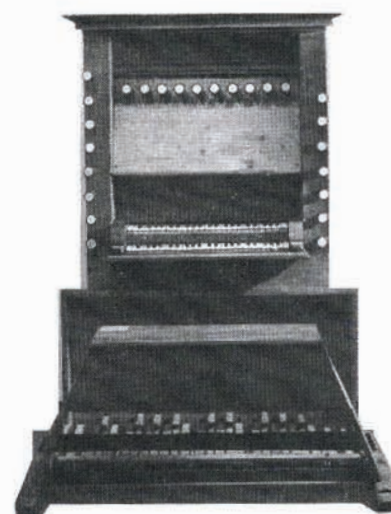
The instrument was called a pianoforte, meaning soft-loud, because, unlike the harpsichord, it allows the fingers to vary the volume.

Baroque harpsichord

Notice how the instrument is decorated. It was the custom to decorate the sides and the inside of the lid. Modern harpsichords often maintain this tradition.



This is the organ in the church at Arnstadt where Bach was employed for a time.



Bach, the court musician

Germany in those days was not a united country as it is now, but a collection of small independent states called principalities. Each principality was governed by a prince, or duke, or some other nobleman. Each of these noblemen was surrounded by his court and each wanted his own court musicians. Bach's first job as a court musician was with the Duke of Weimar in 1708. He worked at Weimar for nine years, but he became angry when the Duke hired someone else to be the Kapellmeister, or music director for the court. So he began looking for another position and found a new job as Kapellmeister at the court of Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Cöthen.

Prince Leopold was fond of **chamber music**, and while Bach remained at Cöthen he wrote a great deal of music for keyboard and small ensembles. He also wrote the music that became known as the Brandenburg Concertos because he dedicated them to the Margrave of Brandenburg.

Chamber music originally meant music to be played in a room in a house. Nowadays the term refers to music written for a very small number of instruments, like duets, trios, or quartets, for example.

The Margrave of Brandenburg

The Margrave was not very interested in the six concertos Bach wrote for him, and the score was lost until he died and his library was sold. One of Bach's students found the music and bought it very cheaply. Today the Brandenburg Concertos are considered some of Bach's best work.



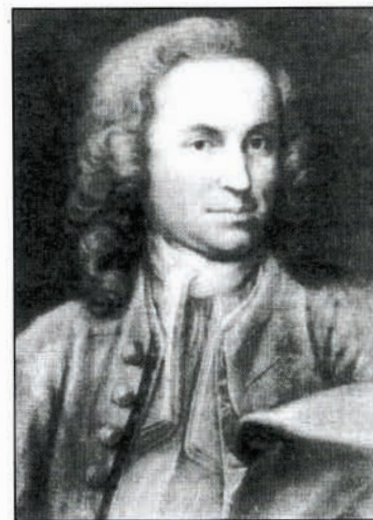
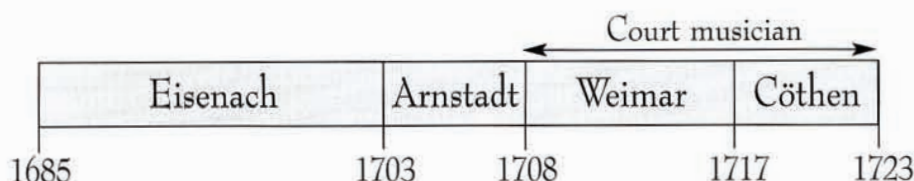
The Duke of Weimar, Bach's employer for nine years

When Bach told the Duke he was leaving, the Duke was so angry that he imprisoned him for a month.



Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Cöthen

The Prince encouraged Bach to write a lot of chamber music.



J. S. Bach, by Johann Ernst Reutsch

This is Bach at the age of 30, when he was director of the orchestra at Weimar.