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Clive Unger-Hamilton

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MUSIC OF THE BAROQUE ERA

Read by **Sebastian Comberti**

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tracks**

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All music tracks are in bold type.

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| 6 | J.S. Bach: Violin Sonata No. 1 in G minor
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| 9 | Many regard the choral music of J.S. Bach... | 0:27 |
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| 13 | Chapter 2: The Beginnings – Italy | 2:11 |
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| 20 | Certon: La, la, la, je ne l’ose dire
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29	Major, Minor and Modulation	1:41
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- 37** Some years younger than Buxtehude was Johann Pachelbel... 0:56
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- 46 In 1683 came the first of Purcell's Odes for St Cecilia's Day... 1:53
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- 59 By contrast, the Sonata in D major, K. 96 is much more rapid... 0:40
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- 63 Although he appeared to have been comfortable enough... 2:04
- 64 **Bach: Brandenburg Concerto No. 2, BWV 1047**
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- 68 **Bach: 'Wedding Cantata', BWV 202**
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- 69 It was on his return from a visit to Karlsbad... 4:28
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- 79 Further on in the same suite... 0:13
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- 85 **Rameau: Suite in E minor–major**
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- 89 **Handel: Acis and Galatea**
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Total time: 4:32:52

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The calendar is generally a poor guide to history. Only numerically did the year 1900 mark the end of the 19th century. In truly historical terms, the 20th century began in 1914 with the start of the First World War. Nor, where music is concerned, was the Classical era by any means a spent force when the 18th century turned into the 19th on safe ground in assigning the neat boundaries of the years 1600–1750 when it comes to the Baroque. How characteristically tidy of J.S. Bach, the culminating giant of the Baroque era, to die in 1750, thus effectively bringing to a close a 150-year age of unprecedented glory. For many – perhaps today more than ever – the Baroque was and remains *the* Golden Age of music, characterised by fantastic variety, profound utterance and unbounded vitality and inspiration.

In its century-and-a-half it saw the first great flowering of opera, the rise of orchestration, the advent of the vocal and instrumental virtuoso, the *stile concertato*, which led to the Baroque concerto, and the primacy of so-called ‘thorough-bass’ (which not only underpinned the Baroque but played a formative role in the birth of the succeeding Classical style).

More than any other period, the 17th century contributed to the development and establishment of clearly defined types and forms, such as the ostinato forms, the variations, the suite, the sonata, the *da capo* aria, the rondo, the concerto, opera, the oratorio and the cantata. Nor was the profusion of innovation confined to form. Much of the era was dominated by the concept of the thorough-bass

– a distinctive texture of two principal contours, melody and bass, filled in by improvised harmonic settings, indicated only by numbers. That said, it was also in the Baroque, and mostly in Germany, that the polyphony of the Renaissance evolved to its highest state of sophistication and power, reaching its peak in the work of J.S. Bach. Other fundamental Baroque conceptions include the highly developed art of improvisation and ornamentation, the epoch-making triumph of tonic and dominant as the principal basis of harmony, and the primacy of the four-bar phrase.

Significantly, the era also saw the transfer of musical sovereignty from Italy – which had led the way during the Renaissance – to Germany, a recent cultural backwater that came to dominate western music for more than three centuries. From the three great S's of the early Baroque (Johann Hermann Schein, Samuel Scheidt and Heinrich Schütz) through Telemann, Handel and the sprawling Bach family, to Haydn, Mozart, Gluck, Beethoven, Schubert, Mendelssohn, Weber and Schumann, on to Liszt

(Hungarian born but essentially Germanic), Wagner, Brahms, Bruckner, Mahler and Strauss, and culminating in the twentieth century with Schoenberg, Webern, Berg, Hindemith and Stockhausen, the list is unparalleled in musical history.

The transition, however, as Clive Unger-Hamilton makes clear, was far from sudden, and the German ascendancy was more apparent than real. The names of Schein, Scheidt and Schütz may have been German, but the music they wrote, or much of it, was richly Italian. Handel, towards the latter part of the Baroque era, was to become the first great German opera composer, but his operas were Italian, not only in language, but in convention and style. Like Handel (and just as ironically), the Austrian-born Mozart became the greatest living Italian opera composer, long after the sun had set on the Baroque era. But, hardly surprisingly, the *first* great Italian opera composer was Italian through and through.

It falls to few men to dominate the age in which they live, but history leaves no doubt that Claudio Monteverdi

(1567–1643) was one of them. He had his distinguished colleagues, even rivals, but he stood alone. To him may be credited, if we simplify a little, not only the birth of great opera, but an extraordinary enrichment of vocal music generally (choral, solo and ensemble, sacred and secular), as well as the concept and early practice of modern orchestration. He was also a pioneer in the use of harmony and the art of word-setting. In striving to express ‘the whole man’, as in much else, he anticipated an age to come.

Monteverdi used instrumentation to enhance the music of voices and to enrich the character and emotions being expressed. His slightly older contemporary Giovanni Gabrieli was the first great composer to cultivate the use of instruments for their own sake. Rather than enjoy the instrumental variety employed by Monteverdi, however, he confined himself – with few exceptions – to brass instruments. Yet he wrote for them as though for voices, producing, in effect, polyphonic songs without words. In this, quite

apart from their intrinsic musical quality, his compositions herald a trend from the sacred to the secular that stands as a hallmark of the Baroque era – the era of the sonata, the concerto, and solo instrumental repertoire, most notably that of the organ as well as the harpsichord and the clavichord.

Of the great founding fathers of the Baroque era, only one was not Italian: but he set a trend. It was primarily in the realm of keyboard music that the Dutchman, Jan Pieterzoon Sweelinck (along with the Italian, Frescobaldi) laid the foundations upon which such later composers as Scheidt, Froberger, Buxtehude, Pachelbel, Kuhnau, Handel and J.S. Bach were to build – every one of them, of course, a German.

The predominant orchestral form of the Baroque was undoubtedly the instrumental concerto, arising from a cross-fertilisation of the Italian operatic aria and the instrumental dance suite. Here again the formative influences were Italian: Corelli, Torelli, Tartini, Albinoni, Geminiani, Manfredini, and most influential (and prolific) of all,

Vivaldi. And in the great German cities – Dresden, Munich, Brunswick, Hanover, Hamburg and Berlin – the dominant influences remained Italian well into the second decade of the 18th century. In the last third of the era, however, the big names had changed – to Telemann, Handel and Bach, the latter two also dominating the worlds of oratorio, chamber and keyboard music. The Baroque era is commonly said to have ended with the death of Bach and the last compositions of Handel, his exact contemporary. The story of its music, however, which was to resonate through the next two-and-a-half centuries, and which resonates today more than ever, was only beginning.

Notes by Jeremy Siepmann



Clive Unger-Hamilton was a professional harpsichordist before he entered the world of publishing and began to write about music. He is the author of several books on music history and related subjects, and writes regular reviews and other articles at home and abroad. He spent 14 years living and working in France before moving to Ely with his wife and family, where he now works as a musicologist, editor and translator.



Born of Italian/German parents, **Sebastian Comberti** was born in London. As a professional cellist of many years, he performs with many of London's chamber orchestras and is active as a recitalist and chamber player. In 2001 he founded the Cello Classics recording label which has won international acclaim for its innovative programming. A somewhat slower career in acting has included voice-over as 'lost boy' in *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* and a walk-on as 'lost cellist' in *The Madness of King George*.

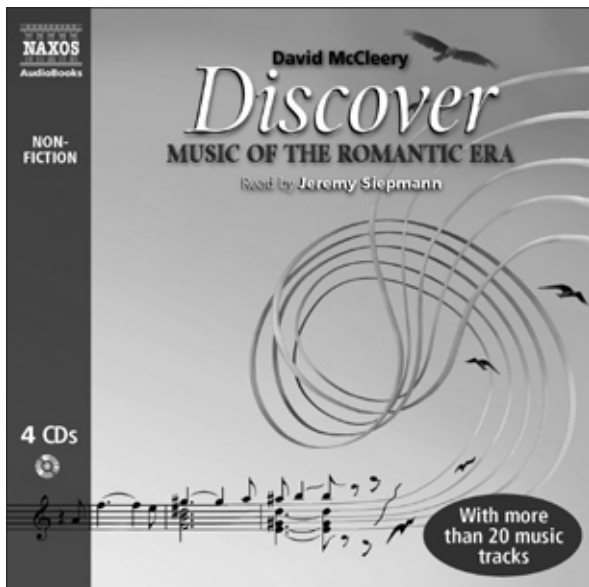
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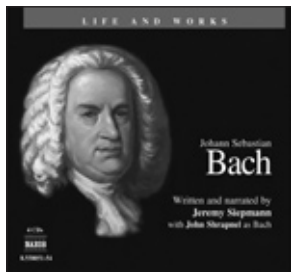
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MUSIC OF THE BAROQUE ERA

Read by **Sebastian Comberti**

Grandiose and glamorous, Baroque music stands alone, written to glorify the finest courts of Europe. Its greatest composers, such as Vivaldi, Handel and Bach, head a fascinating cast of musical magicians, including Albinoni, Pachelbel and Scarlatti. Their lives are as intriguing as their music: we find virtuoso performers who earned their bread and butter in the cathedrals of Europe while keeping company with kings and queens, and setting opera houses ablaze across the continent with their fabulous new music. *Discover Music of the Baroque Era* is rich in musical detail of the time, set against some of the greatest events in history and illustrated by musical extracts that give a true flavour of what there is to discover in the glorious Age of Baroque.

Includes music by Bach, Handel, Scarlatti, Buxtehude, Pachelbel, Lully, Purcell, Corelli, Vivaldi, Charpentier and more.



Sebastian Comberti is a professional cellist and performs with many of London's chamber orchestras. He founded the Cello Classics recording label in 2001.

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