

Asking questions follow-up: The Baroque period, March 2/4

Asking good questions is one of the most important skills in learning—more important than memorization, taking tests, or even getting the “right” answer. Here are some examples of good questions your classmates came up with about the Baroque period last class that expand our thinking beyond the limits of our in-class discussion, they force us to empathize with other people’s experiences, and they encourage us to imagine other possibilities.

These are the kinds of questions you should ask in our online and in-class discussions. In writing, asking yourself meaningful questions leads to inquisitive, interesting, and meaningful ideas, and it’s also the groundwork for a good conclusion to a piece of writing. An effective conclusion doesn’t just repeat what you’ve already said. Instead, it broadens the scope of the writing and shows how your ideas have value beyond what you’ve already stated.

“Taking a step back”: Why is it called “Baroque”?

Understanding the social activity of dance

- How much practice would it take to perform these types of dances?
- Did the king force other rich people to do the dance?
- How did children dance during the period?
- Are there still formal dances today?

Comparing and contextualizing the music making and the people who made the music

- What other genres of music were being made at the time? What type of music was played upon death? What was the most popular kind of music during the Baroque period?
- How did the military use music? How would the music be different if they won or if they lost?
- What kinds of music were made in other regions of the world in the Baroque period?
- How did integration with other cultures outside of their own allow for different music and dances to develop?
- Did musicians have beef/problems/conflict with each other?
- Did the musicians every say something about what they were playing?

Understanding contemporary attitudes about music: Why did they leave the musicians out / Why weren’t the performing musicians acknowledged? Weren’t they the reason that the party existed?

Thinking about our perception and modern reception

- Why did the music sound upbeat but the dances were so slow?
- Why does clothing from the Baroque period look so funny to us in 2020? Did it look “cool” back then?

Economics: How much did musicians get paid?

Units of currency in use during the Renaissance, Baroque, Classical, and Romantic periods

3.5g gold = 1 ducat or florin = 6 lire and 4 soldi¹ = 1.55 scudi = \$490-3,500 modern USD (approx..)

57.7g gold = 19.35 ducats or florins = 120 lire = 30 scudi = \$8,078-57,000 modern USD (approx..)

Sample salaries

- Court musicians were paid better than church or town musicians. The Duke of Ferrara paid all his musicians between 5 and 21 ducats per month. Instrumentalists (except for organists) earned the lowest salaries (e.g., town musicians earned 3 to 6 ducats per month). Organists could earn 50-80 scudi per year. Composers and musicians with more responsibilities earned more. Musicians in larger cities earned more than those in small towns.
- A choirmaster in 1573 in northern Italy: 30 scudi for half a year
- In Bologna in the 16th century, church singers earned 3 lire per month. After 30 years, they could earn 10 to 15 lire per month. The choirmaster earned 10 lire per month in 1540 and 24 lire per month in 1600. The organist earned 12 lire per month.
- Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina earned 6 to 16 scudi per month as a *maestro di cappella* in the mid-1500s. An additional commission or performance could earn him between 5 scudi (for Good Friday) and 88 scudi (for Lent or Holy Week).

Payment besides a salary

- The salary offered to Gabriele Martinego in 1560 in Venice: 70 ducats, 18 bushels of wheat, 12 bushels of millet and oats for horses, 2 kegs of wine, and 30 ducats for general expenses. The salary letter concludes: "...in this city one lives well and cheaply, and there abound fine wares, such as bread, wine, and poultry, so that I advise you as a brother and with due respect to all these advantages, to accept this proposition."
- Housing might be provided free of charge, or it may be calculated in their salary. For example, a choirmaster earning 428 lire per year was "given" an allowance of 140 lire to pay for his housing (that went right back to this patron). The best musicians might be gifted property, houses, farms, forests, access to hospitals, or rights to bridges, roads, mines, or similar enterprises.

Costs of other goods

- In 1769 a horn cost 24 ducats. Court musicians usually didn't own their own instruments; they borrowed them from their patron. Musicians who made their own instruments did so using their stipend or by trading the supplies they had with merchants in town for the tools and materials to build instruments.
- Property purchased by musicians during the 16th century cost 1700 to 4000 lire.

How much money did other people have?

¹ 1 lire = 20 soldi; 1 soldo = 12 denari

- An army captain was paid 15 ducats per month (180 per year). A drummer in the army earned 7 ducats per month.
- A tutor hired for the Duke of Ferrara earned 300 ducats per year.
- Professors at the University of Bologna earned 1200 to 1400 lire per year. Professors in Venice earned 200 ducats per year in 1561.
- The Barberini family (minor noble household established in the first half of the 16th century) brought in around 5 million scudi a year and had a fortune of around 105 million scudi. Their peak of influence came in the 17th century, when they were able to have a family member elected Pope in 1623 (Pope Urban VIII). The current head of the family is the Prince of Palestrina, Benedetto Francesco Barberini (b. 1961); his oldest son is heir to the household.