

In the Renaissance, most written music was for voices (mainly for use in Church services.) Instrumentalists were used for doubling (not accompanying) the vocal lines in a choral work. The main instruments used for this were the *cornetto*, a wooden instrument with a mouthpiece vibrated by the mouth, and the trombone, as the two instruments could play a wide range of notes..

Instruments were also used for dancing. Eventually dances began to be gathered together into suites. These made up the first collections of music written particularly for instrumental ensembles.

In the seventeenth century, instrumental music gradually became more popular. At first, viols, recorders and lutes were favoured. Originally, most music was for small groups - such as a consort ('chest') or viols or recorders, or a 'mixed consort' including different instruments. Once there were enough instruments available - and performers able to play them - it was possible to have more than one performer playing each part. So bigger groups formed. Eventually instrumentalists formed into orchestras. These centred around the viol family. Sometimes lutes, oboes or trumpets were added. The instruments involved depended both on what sort of mood the composer wanted (e.g. trumpets for excitement), and also on whichever players were available.

As instrumental music became more popular, the Renaissance ideal of equal independent voices began to give way to a melody line supported by chords and bass line. Along with this went the practice of *basso continuo*, emphasising the bass line and the chord progressions. (The *basso seguente*, following the bass line, had originated in the sixteenth century.) This was played by bass viol or bassoon. To this were added lute or keyboard, and gradually this evolved into a figured bass. Notation, and freedom of interpretation - varied from country to country - Italian composers tended not to put as many figures in as German and French composers did. Germans lutenists or harpsichordists would be more likely to provide a contrapuntal or imitative accompaniment, where in France there would be more ornamentation.

Instrumentalists were often in demand for playing music for operas. Around the beginning of the seventeenth century in Italy, a group of composers in Florence developed the operatic idea. Before the opera the orchestra played an overture, called a *sinfonia*. This developed from simple origins (simply a fanfare of trumpets) to a series of three sections known as the *Italian Overture*. Most of the singing in the operas was largely dramatic and followed speech rhythms. In order not to detract from the impact of the words, this 'recitative' was given a simple accompaniment of sustained chords, supplied by continuo. At more dramatic moments, the orchestra might supply an *accompagnamento accompagnato*. Instrumental *ritornelli* were sometimes inserted between sections of recitative. These tended to be more lively, and often contrapuntal. So, too, were accompaniments to the 'aria', when A. Scarlatti brought them into use.

Lully developed opera in France. There, operas began with an introduction known as *French overture*. He also produced many ballets. Operas and plays often contained ballet movements. Often they were quite dramatic, animated with lively percussion.

The English court favoured a blend of opera and ballet called the Masque. Masques were elaborate entertainments with staging, ballet, ballroom dancing and singing, and maybe recitations and tableaux. Purcell wrote a lot of music for plays, and a short opera (scored for only strings and continuo).

Instrumental and vocal styles began to be differentiated, although they influenced each other, and sometimes compositions for instruments would be written in a vocal style.

Composers attempted to express emotions in their music. They employed various means to achieve this. Often they employed stylised figures (e.g. falling two-note slurs for sadness). Monteverdi used techniques like string tremolo and pizzicato to express his dramatic intentions. There was a growing use of chromaticism and dissonance. In the early part of the century this was rather experimental (e.g. in the recitatives of Italian opera). However as the century continued chromaticism became restricted to improvisatory pieces (e.g. toccatas) and dissonance almost disappeared.