Music 247 - Music and Ideas II

The Enlightenment and the Influence of Rationalism

Paper I
Handel and Bach: Music and Spirituality

Both Handel and Bach grew up in Lutheran Germany. But their careers diverged widely, and though they both composed a substantial amount of religious music, there were profound differences between them. Your paper will focus on one of these composers and on one genre of religious music of your choosing. You should address the question of how this genre reflected or emerged from the cultural milieu, religious community, and spiritual outlook of the composer.

The paper should be five pages long, double-spaced, and in your best prose style. Please edit and proofread your work carefully before turning it in. All works consulted should be included in a bibliography, and works cited or quoted in your essay should be documented with footnotes. Please see The Chicago Manual of Style for proper format for all types of citations. Our librarian Sarah Canino has created a special page to help you with citation style. You can find the document "Citation Styles and Music" at the Vassar Music Library homepage.

Annotated bibliography due: Monday, 25 February (use correct bibliographical format)
Paper due: Friday, 9 March

The two composers whose work you will study in this essay, George Frideric Handel and Johann Sebastian Bach, are both considered encyclopedic composers, that is, they wrote prolifically in a wide range of contemporary genres. The individual circumstances of their lives, however, were such that each developed musical genres that the other hardly touched, if at all. This applies to their sacred as well as to their secular music. You will need to get acquainted with the contents of their work lists in order to establish which sacred genres they particularly cultivated. Start by studying the work lists provided at the ends of the major articles on Bach and Handel in the latest edition of The New Grove Dictionary of Music. Read the complete New Grove article for each composer, think about their various contributions to sacred music, and then choose the composer and genre that you’d like to work on.

Your bibliography should contain at least ten works, including the following:

1. The New Grove articles on Bach and Handel (remember to cite the authors).
2. A primary source (letters, contemporary biography or account, iconography, other contemporary document).
3. One or more of the important biographies of Bach or Handel. (Note key works by German musicologist that may have recent translations into English.)
4. A book relevant to the genre or religious aspects of this work.
5. One or more articles from scholarly music journals.
6. One or more significant recordings of the works you discuss.

Each entry should include your own brief annotation on the contents of this work and in particular its relevance for your project.

*This assignment was originally designed by Prof. Kathryn Libin for her Music 247.