

Toccata

from the opera

L'Orfeo
(1607)

Claudio Monteverdi
(Italian, 1567 - 1643)

The image shows a page of a musical score for the Toccata from Claudio Monteverdi's opera L'Orfeo. At the top, there is a line of text in Italian: "Toccata che si suona avanti il levar de la tela tre volte con tutti li stromenti, & si fa vn Tuono più alto volendo sonar le trombe con le sordine,". Below this text are several staves of music. The staves are labeled with instrument names: Clarino, Quinta, Alto e basso, Vulgano, and Basso. The music is written in a historical style, with various rhythmic values and ornamentation. The score is presented in a black and white format, typical of a printed musical manuscript.

Text at top of score: "Toccata che si suona avanti il levar de la tela tre volte con tutti li stromenti, e si fa un Tuono più alto volendo sonar le trombe con le sordine"
Free translation: "Play the Toccata three times; on the rising of the curtain use all instruments. If you favor a higher pitch, use trumpets with mutes"

The Composer:

Claudio Monteverdi was born in Cremona in Northern Italy. He wrote his first published music at age 15. He was first employed as a court singer, string player, and conductor. He married at age 32, but his wife died 8 years later, leaving him with three children. At 46, he became conductor at the famed San Marco Basilica in Venice and was ordained as a Catholic priest when 65 years old. He died in Venice at age 76.

Monteverdi's work, often regarded as revolutionary, marked the transition from the music of the Renaissance to that of the Baroque. Enjoying fame in his lifetime, he wrote one of the earliest operas, *L'Orfeo*, which is still regularly performed.

The Composition:

Synopsis of *L'Orfeo*: The action is based on the ancient Greek myth of Orpheus, who attempts to rescue his dead lover Eurydice from Hades, the underworld.

Prologue - The opera begins with a dramatic toccata for brass and percussion. La Musica (a "Spirit of Music") explains the power of music and specifically the power of Orfeo (Orpheus), whose music is so powerful that it is capable of moving the gods themselves.

Act 1 - Orfeo and Eurydice celebrate their wedding day with singing and dances.

Act 2 - The act starts with Orfeo, nymphs, and shepherds in continued celebration. A messenger arrives telling Orfeo that Eurydice has been bitten by a treacherous snake and died; he resolves to go down to the underworld himself to rescue her.

Act 3 - Hope accompanies Orfeo to the entrance to Hades, where she can go no further. Orfeo meets Caronte (Charon), the guardian of Hades, and attempts to trick him into letting him pass with the beauty of his singing. Unsuccessful, he tries again, this time using his lyre, and Caronte falls peacefully asleep while Orfeo passes and descends into Hades.

Act 4 - Proserpina, the queen of Hades, is moved by Orfeo's music and persuades Pluto, king of Hades, to let Eurydice go. Pluto acquiesces on one condition: that Orfeo not look back as Eurydice follows him into the light and back to life on Earth. Orfeo begins his ascent from Hades, singing in praise of his lyre, with Eurydice following him. His doubts, however, impel him to look back over his shoulder and Eurydice vanishes like a phantom before his eyes. Despondent, he returns to Earth alone.

Act 5 - Orfeo is consumed by grief. Apollo, his father, comes down from the heavens to take his son away, where he can behold the image of Eurydice forever in the stars.

Performance History:

From Wikipedia:

"...the opera, which starts with a **Tocatta** that is sounded three times before the curtain rises with all the instruments, and a tone higher with muted trumpets. The indications in the score of the register of the trumpets (clarino, quinta, alto e basso, vulgano and basso) suggest that what is intended is a fanfare of trumpets: it is here presumed that, in contrast with what is prescribed in the direction, the signal that the opera is beginning ought to be entrusted solely to the trumpets, which were probably those of a possible military corps, deputed to provide trumpet-calls. . . .Follino wrote as follows, in describing the festivities of 1608: *And when the torches were lit in the theatre, the usual trumpet fanfare was given from behind the stage, and at the start of the third fanfare the great curtain that concealed the stage disappeared in the winking of an eye.*"

Performance Suggestions:

Though scored for full band, the work can effectively be performed by brass and percussion only. When using the full wind ensemble, it is suggested that the drums (multiple players, as desired, on toms or snares: off) are tacet during the second repeat or that only a single player is used, with the remaining players joining at measure 18 for the last repeat at *fortissimo*. If euphonium and tuba mutes are available, the director might wish to use them on the second repeat rather than omitting the instruments. The low voice parts (those with only whole notes) are written as split parts so the director can choose the appropriate voicing to balance the ensemble.

CLICK HERE to listen to this piece while viewing the music

Score

1x = *f* - Brass/Drums
2x = *mf* - Ww/muted Brass (no Tuba)/solo Drum
3x = *ff* - All

Toccata

from *L'Orfeo*

Claudio Monteverdi (Italian, 1567-1643)
arranged by Brian Harris

Allegro (♩ = 126)

3

1x = brass only; 2x = loco; 3x = 8va

The score is arranged in a standard orchestral format with multiple staves for each instrument family. The key signature has one flat (B-flat) and the time signature is 4/4. The piece is marked 'Allegro' with a tempo of 126 beats per minute. A first ending bracket spans measures 1 through 6, with a circled '3' indicating a triple repeat. The score includes dynamic markings such as *mf*, *ff*, *f*, *mf*, and *ff*, as well as performance instructions like '1st time = brass only', '2nd time = muted', and 'simile'. The drum part (snare off) is marked with *mf* for the first and third times and *f* for the second time.

This page of the musical score covers measures 12 through 16. The instruments are arranged as follows:

- Flute (Fl.):** Melodic line with eighth-note patterns.
- Oboe (Ob.):** Melodic line with eighth-note patterns.
- Bassoon (Bsn.):** Sustained notes with *vc* (vibrato) markings.
- Clarinet 1 (Clar. 1):** Melodic line with eighth-note patterns.
- Clarinet 2 (Clar. 2):** Rhythmic accompaniment with sixteenth-note patterns.
- Clarinet 3 (Clar. 3):** Rhythmic accompaniment with sixteenth-note patterns.
- Bass Clarinet (B. Clar.):** Sustained notes with *vc* markings.
- Alto Saxophone (A. Sx.):** Rhythmic accompaniment with sixteenth-note patterns.
- Tenor Saxophone (T. Sx.):** Sustained notes with *vc* markings.
- Bass Saxophone (B. Sx.):** Sustained notes with *vc* markings.
- Trumpet 1 (Trpt. 1):** Melodic line with eighth-note patterns.
- Trumpet 2 (Trpt. 2):** Rhythmic accompaniment with sixteenth-note patterns.
- Horn (Hn.):** Melodic line with eighth-note patterns.
- Trombone 1 (Trom. 1):** Melodic line with eighth-note patterns.
- Trombone 2 & 3 (Trom. 2, 3):** Sustained notes with *vc* markings.
- Euphonium/Tuba (Euph. Tuba):** Sustained notes with *vc* markings.
- Drum:** Rhythmic accompaniment with eighth-note patterns.

Measure numbers 12, 13, 14, 15, 16 are indicated at the bottom of the score. A large purple watermark "Promotional Sample Only" is overlaid across the page.

1, 2.

3.

Fl.

Ob.

Bsn.

Clar. 1

Clar. 2

Clar. 3

B. Clar

A. Sx.

T. Sx.

B. Sx.

17

18

19

20

21

22

1, 2.

3.

Trpt. 1

Trpt. 2

Hn.

Trom. 1

Trom. 2, 3

Euph
Tuba

1, 2.

3.

2nd time = tutti

fp *mf*
2x *ff*