

THE INFLUENCE OF MUSIC ON THE ELIZABETHAN ERA

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ABSTRACT: *The main motive of this research is to mainly study and find the features of the Music in the Elizabethan era. The Elizabethan era marked the pinnacle of music in England. The Elizabethan music went through a complete transformation from sacred to secular music and the introduction of musical instruments along with the songs. Elizabeth I was not just fond of music, but she could play various instruments such as flute and virginal. The introduction of complex music and the influence of musical instruments along with vocals truly marked the beginning of the English music that people are fond even today. The whole century has been the witness to the constant experiment and development of music which would not have been possible without the constant encouragement of the Queen. This research made us aware of the era where the contemporary music or songs played by the actors in the Elizabethan theatre and how it started to evolve.*

KEYWORD: Music, Elizabethan Era, Instruments, development.

INTRODUCTION

Overview

The Elizabethan Era started during the reign by Queen Elizabeth 1 from 1558-1603 (Boyd, 1940). It is often considered that the English art, culture and music reached the pinnacle during this time. To start from the basics, there is an uplift in the standard of living of the people at that time. People were bored of their monotonous life of simply earning their bread and living. This marked the journey of the Elizabethan music era where the natural tone of music was sacred to secular music. It is also noticed that the use of various kinds of instruments was started to incorporate along with the traditional music. Elizabeth had a great taste for music, and as a result, professional musicians were employed by the Church of England (Bukofzer, 2013). Gradually the love of music slowly started getting incorporated among the middle class of the society too. Not just that Queen Elizabeth 1 was also fond of dancing and considered it to be great means of physical exercise. As a result, she also employed musicians who would sing for her while she was dancing to those tunes. It is seen that during her reign she showed great interest in music and appointed almost 70 musicians.

Background

According to Willis (2010), the interest of the queen in music is followed by her subjects. It is observed from researches and studying the Elizabethan era that there are two different kinds of theatres that were totally different from one another in terms of their architecture, but also in accordance of the cultural entertainment, which was known in the old days as 'public' and 'private' (Smith, 2005). Though there was not much of a difference as the private theatres could also be accessed by the public, but the main difference was the price to get admission in the private theatres. Gradually the music started to be transformed in these private theatres and music with the accompaniment of the instruments started getting accustomed in these theatres.

The nature of performance in these theatres started becoming remarkable in respect to the historical presentations. The players in the common theatre were mostly men, and the performance was done mainly by choir boys in these theatres. They added beauty and grace to the plays by adding emotions through their music. Besides the liberal intervention of gracious lyrics, the act intervals were typically marked by the careful selection of instrumental music. During this period the boy's performance was distinct and was much appreciated, so the composite tune, lyrics and the music were never imitated by the common players. From the facts of the diary of Philip Julius, it is observed that the plays played during the Elizabethan era marked great resemblance to hours of delightful musical entertainment accompanied by various instruments such as flute, violins, mandolins, lutes (Lawrence, 1920). The melody of the voice of the boy singing along with the bass violin created an aura of serenity around the theatre. Thought this created a lot of tension and confusion among the common men who were orthodox enough to cope up with the changes.

Problem statement

The common men were not ready to adapt the changes that were going around the theatres and created a mist of confusion among them. This phrase of time had to deal with some problems to cope up with the changes around them. During the initial days, the common theatres were not adopted to the preliminary and interact music. This period also marked the drastic changes in the plays where music with the influence of instruments started to be the main attraction of the plays. Even musical preludes were enacted between each act of the play.

Research aim

The main motive of this research is to mainly study and find the features of the Music in the Elizabethan era. This research made us aware of the era where the contemporary music or songs played by the actors in the theatre started to evolve. The single person was given the authority to sing whose voice was soothing and played along with other instruments. The class of music started evolving with the addition of instruments in it. This age also marked the journey of many amateur musicians who finally made the music of the Elizabethan era distinct from other generation.

Research questions

This research will help to answer some questions such as

1. How is the music from this era different from the music of other eras?
2. How the common people during the Elizabethan era adapted to the changes in music as well as society?
3. What are the most distinctive features of the music in Elizabethan era?

Justification

This research paper emphasizes the cultural aspect well as the musical aspects of the Elizabethan era. Many journals and documents are analyzed to understand properly the impact and development of music in this era. This research paper describes the influence of instruments in music and how it became a distinctive mark of this era.

LITERATURE REVIEW

During the early Elizabeth era, it must be admitted that there was very little proof of music in between the acts. Most of the entertainment was dependent on the performance of the actors and the story of the play. Thought music was an essential part of the common people during this era, but it took time to incorporate with the plays that were performed. Thought elaborate compositions were performed in the Queen's court and simple folklore, and Ballard's were common among the villagers to ease their burden of work (Willis, 2009). The music that was favoured by the common men were simple yet emotive songs. Although Elizabethan music was creative, pleasant and soothing the most influential contribution was the accompaniment of musical instruments along with the songs. During a play in 1593 namely a dead man's fortune, subsequent use of instrumental music can be seen naively used in this play.

The first royal patent to use instrumental music besides comedies, tragedies and dramas were sanctioned on May 1574. The only instruments used by Burberg and his fellow members were drums and trumpets during the chronicle plays. Dumb shows became a very crucial part and became a distinguished feature of the Elizabethan drama. Travelling was not encouraged during this era and in the place of the troubadour, Travers and court singers emerged. During the Elizabethan era feasts, festivals and fairs were common, and many of them were dedicated to the Saints. The musicians played music on the streets during these events. According to Kuin (1998), the musicians used light instruments that could be easily carried such as fiddles, lutes, tambourine etc. The street musicians in the Elizabethan era was varied, and musicians could play a wide range of songs from lively music, to spiritual songs to heroic Ballard's. The culture of rich music found its stepping stones during this era. The influence of music was also notable in the plays during this era. There were several theatres and institutions where the certified musicians practised and also trained the amateur musicians. Music and musical instruments had become an integrated part of the plays, and there are instances where the musicians were also called up on the stage to act if there was a shortage of actors for the particular play.

The Southwark Waits were specially identified for the excellence of their music. Instrumental music was on the rise, and for an organization of this stature, it is likely that they would have at least six instruments namely two violins (one for bass and the other for treble), a table lute, flute, a cither and a Pandora (Smith, 2001). The play along with the orchestra was meant to fill up the gaps between the dialogues of the play and give the audience some excitement and thrill. The most famous instrument of that time is lute strung with sheep gut. These lutes were quite a versatile instrument as they could be played solo as well as along a singer. Later the compositions made by this lute was known as lute songs, and the most famous composer of lute songs during the Elizabethan era was John Dowland. As the research on music, the music of the English Renaissance period is considered to have the most complex polyphonic vocal music and also as the emergence of instrumental music. Austern (1985) mentioned after Dowland, Henry Purcell was considered to be the greatest composer during the era and England suffered a decline in the musical standings among other European countries after he died until the beginning of the Victorian era. The common musicians who performed in the towns were known as Waits, and their duty was to perform on the public occasions. They were supposed to compose their own music and entertain the common people. Then came the street musicians who were known as minstrels who used to travel from place to place and sing songs of their journey. Very soon these minstrels were replaced by theatre musicians and tavern, although the waits continued to perform in the public places such as the market and fairs. Gradually theatres became more and more popular with the indulgence of instrumental music in them.

These musical in the theatres gave an additional effect to the plays and also grabbed the attention of much more viewers. The growth of instrumental music can be noted with the rise of William Shakespeare during 1556 (Lewis, 2013).

Queen Elizabeth herself was a benevolent lover of music and an accomplished virginal player herself. She had given employment to many musicians, actors and singers. The queen encouraged musical experiments and encouraged the musicians to incorporate instruments for a superior sound and eventually to result in the most popular combination of the music of the Elizabethan era. The continuous experiment with musical instruments also brought forward new kinds of musical instruments such as the early violin, the early oboe and the keyboard. With these new instruments, more refined sounds could be produced which totally distinct the music of the Elizabethan era from the medieval music. The huge popularity of music during this era is reflected upon many plays and dramas during this time, and one of the notable instances is William Shakespeare who had made more than 500 references of songs and music in his works (Murray, 2014). These musical plays were termed as consorts because of all the instruments 'consort' to one another.

As music was deeply connected with the plays, the musicians also gained the same importance or more than the actors. There were special galleries just above the stage for the musicians and sometimes the musicians played on the stage itself. But there are also instances where the musicians were placed below the stage to add an eerie effect to the play. The musical instruments that were used by these musicians also dependent on the type of play, for example, the comedies are full of songs and gentle humming of the lutes whereas the tragedies and the historical events were marked by the ceremonial sounds of drums and trumpets (Gibson, 2013). Similarly to depict romantic plays the use of flutes and violins were used. Thus it is evident that each of the musical instruments could be linked to each of the moods of the play and all the sounds during these plays varied from one another. The direction of the loud music marked the end of each part of the play. Thus it is understood that the music of this era is different and stands alone as the music in this era directly came from the heart for her music was a medium of escape, and she wanted to entertain the common people with the simplicity of the music. Some of the great works on music that highlighted us the achievement of music during the Elizabethan era is from the collection of William Byrd and notably Frizwilliam Virginal Book and Parthenia. Some of the famous composers of the Elizabethan era are Robert Johnson, John Tavernier, Orlando Gibbons etc. This is evident that the rich culture had influenced the type of play that was originally played before the Elizabethan era and also the influence of music has greatly transformed the socio-cultural aspect of England during the Elizabethan era.

METHODOLOGY

In order to input correct information in this research, a thorough study of the culture and sociology during the Elizabethan era is studied from the old journals and articles. From the works of the great writers and composers such as William Shakespeare, John Bull, John Downland and many others the influence of music and musical instruments in the theatres were observed and studied. From the works of these composers, this is evident that the Elizabethan era had gone through some critical changes in aspect to their music. The study also shows that during this era many new musical instruments were also introduced to elevate the quality of music.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

This research has helped to understand the influence of music in the Elizabethan era and how the whole socio-cultural aspect developed as a result of music. By the findings of this research, it is seen that Queen Elizabeth 1 herself was a very big follower of music and loved to play various musical instruments by herself. Although music had been an integral part of the lives of the common people and villagers used to play and listen to Ballard's to overcome the monotonous life (Von Ende, 1965). To understand properly the impact of the Elizabethan era in the music of that time the music culture of the medieval period is put into consideration.

The medieval period is a time of Dark Age that has gone through feminine, plague and barbarism. As a result, it has its effect on society and the music at that time which was generally very simple. As the church controlling the religion music, saints used to sing about secular music. Songs during this time were monophonic, and it mainly consists of a singular melody without any harmony or any kinds of accompaniments. But gradually during the 15th century, the use of instruments were introduced, and it became the most significant part of the music of the Elizabethan era (Strong, 1986). During the Elizabethan era, fairs and feasts were very common as well as seasonal, and they were mainly dedicated to the births of saints such as May Day, St Valentine's Day and many others. During these festivals street musicians placed in the market places to gather people. They were not just singing but also used small, portable musical instruments such as fiddles, lutes, and tambourine. There was no classification of music, and they started to play lively music to dancing songs to historical Ballard's. While the common people were busy with the songs and Ballard's the Elizabethan court offered far more sophisticated music with the accompaniment of various musical instruments such as violin, flute etc. and this served as the stepping stones for the more contemporary compositions of the future. Queen Elizabeth was very much fond of music, and as a result, she appointed many singers and musicians in her court. Martin (1981) opined the citizens also started to follow the type of music as their Queen and as result music started to become part of plays and dramas. By the encouragement of the Queen experimentation of the music also took place to achieve a superior quality of music which gradually came to be known as the English Consort. This new type of music consisted of the use of four main instruments namely the violin, flute, lute and viol. The influence of English consort could be seen in the plays written by William Shakespeare; there are numerous instances where we get the reference of music in his plays. The complexity of sounds and the use of various musical instruments truly marked the Elizabethan era of music.

DISCUSSION

It is very much evident that the Elizabethan era marked the pinnacle of music in England. The Elizabethan music went through a complete transformation from sacred to secular music and the introduction of musical instruments along with the songs. Elizabeth 1 was not just fond of music but she could play various instruments such as flute and virginal. Music became such an integral part of the society that all the noblemen were expected to play any kind of musical instrument, and for the girls, it was very necessary that they could take proper place along with the vocals or other instruments. Those who could not match with the music became a laughing stock for the society. Musicians who were qualified to perform in front of the Queen or her court were permitted to print their musical works. This helped the amateur musicians to buy their work and practice. Elizabeth also tried to change the language of these songs from the

traditional Latin to more commonly used the English language. Some of the most famous composers of the era are Thomas Tallis and his follower William Byrd and both of them composed their vocal works in both Latin and English.

CONCLUSION

The research has been concluded with the transformation of music from the medieval period to the Elizabethan era. The introduction of complex music and the influence of musical instruments along with vocals truly marked the beginning of the English music that we are so fond today. The whole century has been the witness to the constant experiment and development of music which would not have been possible without the constant encouragement of the Queen. Even the introduction of such diversified music also affected the plays of that time. The use of different kinds of music started to be used in between the plays to give effects. Thus separate stages or platforms were made in the theatres for the musicians to perform. The poignant soar and bloom of the orchestra that nowadays we associate with the classical music of greats such as Beethoven, Mozart would never have been possible without the immense contribution from the pioneers of the Elizabethan era. Therefore it is very well established that the culture of music that the Elizabethan era procured not only affected the social and cultural activities of the time but has an immense contribution on the music that we are accustomed in listening today.

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