

ORYX 506 - Baroque Music for Contemplation

The purpose of this compilation is to induce a state of relaxation, wherein stress is relieved, and the brain is in state receptive to contemplation and learning.

Research has found that the ideal state for contemplation and the relaxed intake of information exists when the brain is in a relaxed, but aware state - not asleep, but relaxed in the sense of being fully focused and aware. At this point the brainwaves run at about 8 to 12 cycles per seconds or hertz. This is called the *Alpha state*.

This compares with the 'normal' state of 13-25 hertz which is called the *Beta state*. The beta state is that of most of our waking moments as we go about our daily lives. At the other end of the spectrum we find, just below the alpha level, the *Theta state* which is even slower than alpha, and an even deeper sense of relaxation; it is however more difficult to achieve, and really requires one to have the ability to meditate deeply. It is a highly creative state. Slower still is the state of sleep which is the *Delta state*.

The *Alpha State* can be achieved in a number of ways and most of us achieve it at some during most days. A typical time may be just before one goes to sleep, or as one wakes. At this time the mind is clear, receptive to information, and rapidly makes 'connections', realizations, and joins up thoughts. This state is also great for releasing stress.

Researchers have found that certain music types ease the brainwaves into the relaxed '*Alpha state*' that is ideal for *SuperLearning*. One form of this SuperLearning music is the largo movements of certain Baroque composers.

The *Largo* movements are around 40 to 60 beats per minute. In many string concertos and other works, the *Largo* movements often encapsulate the quintessential thematic and emotional material. However it is their 40-60 beats per minute and slow rhythm that slow body and mind functions and allow an *alpha* state of mind. This enables one to excel in retention and recall of materials presented in 20 minute intervals.

The simple combination of music and learning is being employed successfully throughout the world as a way to dramatically accelerate the learning process and make it enjoyable. Music also has the ability to synchronize the brain's left analytical hemisphere with the right creative spatial hemisphere. When both hemispheres are engaged, the brain is able receive more information. One can retrieve information quickly because the music acts as a carrier wave to long-term memory storage.

According to Gordon Dryden and Dr. Jeannette Vos, authors of "*The Learning Revolution*":
"Music stimulates and awakens, reviving bored or sleepy learners and increasing blood and oxygen flow to the brain. Music inspires emotion, creating a clear passage to long-term memory. Music is a stage-changer and can be used effectively to get students into an effective learning state."

Will any music suit the purpose? Given that slow, *Adagio* movements at between 40 and 60 beats-per-minute are most conducive to relaxation, why especially *Baroque*? The answer to this lies in the nature of Baroque music and its place in musical development.

The story of music begins with the earliest origins of musical expression as we know it in the West today. Music of the 1200s and 1300s sounds relatively primitive in terms of melody and harmony. If we move to the 1500s we find a great difference, as Italian music began to blossom and English composers like Dowland, Morley and Tomkins produced the wonderful melodies and surprisingly sensitive poetry which accompanied them - or vice versa. A major theme underlying music at that time however was the exploration of form. There was still so much new to discover - new melodic lines and harmonic progressions to be explored, new combinations of instruments, and new forms in music such as the fugue, canon, and variations on a bass line, a popular tune or a chorale.

As the 1600s progressed, so these different musical forms took on definite shape, and the period from 1700 to 1750 can clearly be seen as the "*High Baroque*", as well as the culmination of the development of the musical forms we know today.

The Baroque Spirit expressed in music is: *Order, Pattern, and Form*. Here there is to be no disorder, no atonal meandering, no shapeless movements. In the Baroque musical repertoire we find Fugues, in which a given theme is repeated in different clefs, and the stricter *Canon* which is a 'round', each entry following or overlapping the previous one.

There is also a whole group of Variations: variations on a chorale melody, variations on a single, repeating bass-line (*Passacaglia*), and variations on a popular theme - the *Chaconne*.

In that the *Chaconne* belongs securely among the most orderly of Baroque forms, yet is based on a recognizable melody, freer than the *Passacaglia*, much freer than the Fugue or Canon, it may justifiably be said to be the most readily enjoyable form among typical Baroque musical idioms.

Both the *Chaconne* and the *Passacaglia* originated in dances, the *Chaconne* apparently in Spain where it was also considered to be of native South American origin. These were slow dances of three-beats-in-a-measure, usually based directly upon a *ground-bass*, or planned in short sections similar to those resulting from a ground bass. The *Chaconne* theme in Baroque times was frequently derived from a popular tune. Thus the orderly forms into which Baroque music is shaped, contain the basic ingredients of tuneful melodies and folk rhythms.

Music which is melodious yet so constructed as to reflect the "perfect order" of the universe: that is the essence of the Baroque.

In the words of Baroque composer and theorist Johann Joseph Fux: "*A composition meets the demands of good taste if it is well constructed, avoids trivialities as well as willful eccentricities, aims at the sublime, but moves in a natural ordered way, combining brilliant ideas with perfect workmanship.*"

On this disc we have assembled three programs or groups of pieces. Each group consists of approximately 20 minutes' *Adagio* movements at 40-60 bpm, and terminates with a faster, more lively movement. We have tried to keep the amplitude even throughout in order to maximize its relaxing properties without having any passages break the concentration.

Use this CD for *SuperLearning*, for meditation, contemplation, relieving stress, or simply as enjoyable, relaxing listening.