**The Contributions from Three Precursors to the Genesis of the Symphony around the Mid-Eighteenth Century**

In the seventeenth century, the symphony was considered the top of instrumental music, and it was often functioned as the overture, ritornello, and to ensemble works, such as sonatas or concertos.[[1]](#footnote-1) However, the symphony started growing in importance during the eighteenth century. This essay will be focusing on three orchestral precursors, who formally contributed to the genesis of the symphony around the mid-eighteenth century, dwelling particularly on instruments and performance contexts.

The symphony is originated from Italy, and it was often used for Italian opera overture.[[2]](#footnote-2) The most important precursor who contributed to the symphony is G.B. Sammartini. Sammartini was born in Milan in 1700, and his musical background was started from the late Baroque style.[[3]](#footnote-3) Because of this, his musical writing and language tend to close to the Baroque style. Sammartini’s music was usually performed in church and also performed in private concerts of the nobility, the colleges of the city, and the unusual outdoor concerts.[[4]](#footnote-4) the concert symphony was mainly requested by nonprofessional music lovers.[[5]](#footnote-5) Sammartini’s symphonies are divided into three main periods, the middle period (1740-1758) is where we focusing on.[[6]](#footnote-6) The duration of his symphonies grew longer from the early period to the late, some of the middle and late symphonies are exceeded 12 minutes, and few early symphonies are less than seven minutes, because of the influence of Italian operas the early symphonies tend to be shorter.[[7]](#footnote-7) Most of his symphonies are in three movements, Fast-Slow-Fast or minuet.[[8]](#footnote-8) In his middle symphonies, the last movements tend to be a minuet, again, due to the strong influence from Italian operas.[[9]](#footnote-9) The orchestration that he used for his symphonies in the early period is usually only strings: seven first violins, five second violins, three violas, two cellos, and 2 basses (doubled by two bassoons).[[10]](#footnote-10) While in the middle symphonies, he added horns and trumpets in his orchestra.[[11]](#footnote-11) The texture of his symphonic writing was very important to himself, Sammartini was seeking ways of incorporating counterpoint with a predominantly homophonic idiom.[[12]](#footnote-12) In his early symphonies, the texture is usually in three-part writing due to the influence of the Baroque trio sonata, whereas the middle symphonies moved into four-part writing.[[13]](#footnote-13) In addition, the middle symphonies have more frequent use of imitation (especially in second movements), and a thematic interdependence of all parts.[[14]](#footnote-14)

The symphony started spreading to Germany, France, England and Austria, the most notable city was Mannheim, where Johann Stamitz developed his career.[[15]](#footnote-15) Stamitz is another important precursor of early symphonies. He was appointed as the director of music in the Mannheim court in 1741 or 1742.[[16]](#footnote-16) Stamitz developed the orchestra’s size to twenty violins, four violas, four cellos, four horns, and two basses, in 1756.[[17]](#footnote-17) It was the largest orchestra in Europe, and people were impressed by the size, the quality of the performance, and the discipline of the performers.[[18]](#footnote-18) Stamitz even established the traditions of great discipline and precision in performing and rehearsing, including the use of uniform bowings.[[19]](#footnote-19) Stamitz’s symphonies are composed for the Mannheim orchestra, due to the facilities of the orchestra was rich, he was able to make interesting effects on dynamic, texture, and melodic clichés in Mannheim unique style.[[20]](#footnote-20) In the mid-eighteenth century, his symphonies are scored in eight parts: four strings, two horns, and two oboes, although flutes and clarinets may substitute for the oboes.[[21]](#footnote-21) Furthermore, Stamitz extended the symphonic structure from three movements to four movements, with minuet and trio as the third movement and followed by a finale, often marked *Presto or Prestissimo*.[[22]](#footnote-22) Also, Stamitz featured the idea of the crescendo, he applied it as the orchestral crescendo, or ‘roller’, an exciting outburst of sound able to make an audience lifting out their chair.[[23]](#footnote-23) This innovation was not just a dynamic increase, it is also related to a rising melodic line, tremolo, harmonic acceleration, and cumulative addition of instruments.[[24]](#footnote-24) Moreover, Stamitz developed a gradual expansion of phrase structure, from a half-bar motifs to two-bar phrases (in 4/4 time and fast tempo), which is considered as the most essential of later Classical phrase structure, he also established four-bar phrase or longer phrase in the later years.[[25]](#footnote-25) The duration of Stamitz’s symphonies are much longer than Sammartini’s most of them are around 10 minutes, few of them will even go up to 16 mins. Stamitz visited Paris and directed the orchestra of La Pouplinière in 1754-1755, because of his visit, French early symphonies have the influences from him.[[26]](#footnote-26)

Paris was the most significate city for the publication and performance of symphonic music, and the private and public concerts had grown as never before.[[27]](#footnote-27) François-Joseph Gossec is another precursor who contributed to the symphony. He was a Belgian, but went to Paris in 1751, and become the most important composer for developing the strength of the French symphony.[[28]](#footnote-28) Under the influences of Rameau, Gossec obtained a post in the orchestra of La Pouplinière.[[29]](#footnote-29) In 1756, he published his first set of six symphonies as Opus 3. [[30]](#footnote-30) All the symphonies follow the Italian model, in three movements, and orchestrated for string and the basses.[[31]](#footnote-31) However, the last symphony has less Italian models, which has oboes in the instrumentation, rhythmic cliché, crescendi, and lack of a development section in the large-scale outer movement still point to the Italian overture.[[32]](#footnote-32) The next group of symphonies, Opus 4, is composed in 1758. This set of works is clear that it is influenced by Stamitz or the Mannheim school. The symphonies are in four movements, with a minuet and trio to the form, and also added separate parts for wind instrument (two horns are added in the orchestra, besides the first, which also had two oboes, and the last, which without any wind instruments).[[33]](#footnote-33) The full characteristic of Gossec’s symphonic achievement becomes apparent with the symphonies of Opus 5 and Opus 6, which composed in 1761-1762.[[34]](#footnote-34) In the Opus 6, he abandoned the four-movement structure and frequently introduced unusual instrumental combinations, unconventional designs, and the use of fugal movements.[[35]](#footnote-35) Gossec as a nationalist, all the tempo and performance directions in his symphonies are in French.[[36]](#footnote-36)

In conclusion, these three precursors are contributed a lot to the genesis of the symphony around the mid-eighteenth century. They had expanded orchestra’s size from just strings, to include woodwinds in the orchestra. Besides that, the structure of the symphony is also developed, from three-movement to four-movement structure. Moreover, longer phrase structure and duration of the piece, basically symphony is growing bigger and longer. They inspired many classical composers in later years, such as Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven. (1428 Words)

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