

Chaconne

A **chaconne** (French pronunciation: [ʃaˈkɔn]; Italian: *ciaccona*) is a type of musical composition popular in the baroque era when it was much used as a vehicle for variation on a repeated short harmonic progression, often involving a fairly short repetitive bass-line (ground bass) which offered a compositional outline for variation, decoration, figuration and melodic invention. In this it closely resembles the Passacaglia.

The ground bass, if there is one, may typically descend stepwise from the tonic to the dominant pitch of the scale, the harmonies given to the upper parts may emphasize the circle of fifths or a derivative pattern thereof.

History

Though it originally emerged during the late sixteenth century in Spanish culture, having reputedly been introduced from the New World, as a quick dance-song characterized by suggestive movements and mocking texts,^[1] by the early eighteenth century the chaconne had evolved into a slow triple meter instrumental form.

One of the best known and most masterful and expressive examples of the chaconne is the final movement from the Violin Partita in D minor by Johann Sebastian Bach. This 256-measure chaconne takes a plaintive four-bar phrase through a continuous kaleidoscope of musical expression in both major and minor modes.

After the Baroque period, the chaconne fell into decline during the 19th century, though the *32 Variations in C minor* by Beethoven suggest its continuing influence. However, the form saw a very substantial revival during the 20th century, with more than two dozen composers contributing examples (see below).

Chaconne and passacaglia

The chaconne has been understood by some nineteenth and early twentieth-century theorists—in a rather arbitrary way—to be a set of variations on a harmonic progression, as opposed to a set of variations on a melodic bass pattern (to which is likewise artificially assigned the term *passacaglia*),^[2] while other theorists of the same period make the distinction the other way around.^[3] In actual usage in music history, the term "chaconne" has not been so clearly distinguished from passacaglia as regards the way the given piece of music is constructed, and "modern attempts to arrive at a clear distinction are arbitrary and historically unfounded."^[4] In fact, the two genres were sometimes combined in a single composition, as in the *Cento partite sopra passacagli* by Girolamo Frescobaldi, and the first suite of *Les Nations* (1726) as well as in the *Pièces de Violes* (1728) by François Couperin.^[5]

Frescobaldi, who was probably the first composer to treat the chaconne and passacaglia comparatively, usually (but not always) sets the former in major key, with two compound triple-beat groups per variation, giving his chaconne a more propulsive forward motion than his passacaglia, which usually has four simple triple-beat groups per variation.^[6] Both are usually in triple meter, begin on the second beat of the bar, and have a theme of four measures (or a close multiple thereof). (In more recent times the chaconne, like the passacaglia, need not be in 3/4 time.)

A chaconne's bass line—let alone the chords involved—may not always be present in exactly the same manner, although the general outlines remain understood. (Handel's "Chaconne" in G minor for keyboard^[7] has only the faintest relationship to the understood form.)

Examples of chaconnes

17th century

- Heinrich Ignaz Franz Biber: Ciacona in D major, for violin and basso continuo
- John Blow: Chaconne for harpsichord (1687)
- Dieterich Buxtehude: Prelude, Fugue, and Chaconne in C Major (BuxWV 137), Chaconne in C minor (BuxWV 159), Chaconne in E minor (BuxWV 160); all for organ
- Johann Kaspar Kerll: Ciacona, for organ or harpsichord
- Jean-Baptiste Lully: Chaconne from *Phaëton* (1683)
- Jean-Baptiste Lully: Chaconne from *Roland* (1685)
- Marin Marais: Chaconne in G major, for two violas da gamba and continuo, no. 47 from the *Première Livre de pièces de violes* (1686–89)
- Marin Marais: Chaconne, from Suite no. 1 in C major in the *Pièces en trio pour les flûtes, violon, et dessus de violes* (1692)
- Marin Marais: Chaconne, from act 2 of the opera *Sémélé* (1709)
- Marin Marais: Chaconne, from the *Suite d'un Goût Etranger*, from the [*Quatrième Livre de*] *Pièces à une et à trois violes* (1717)
- Claudio Monteverdi: *Zefiro Torna* from *Scherzi musicali cioè arie et madrigali* (Venice, 1632) an early example of vocal music sung to a chaconne accompaniment.
- Johann Pachelbel: six organ chaconnes (including *Chaconne in D minor* and *Chaconne in F minor*), two chamber chaconnes in *Musicalische Ergötzung*
- Henry Purcell: Chacony for strings and continuo in G minor Z. 730 (1680)
- Henry Purcell: Chaconne from *The Fairy Queen* (1692)
- Robert de Visée: Chaconne in A minor for theorbo.

18th century

- Johann Sebastian Bach: "Chaconne" from Partita No. 2 for Solo Violin in D minor
- Johann Sebastian Bach: "Meine Tage in dem Leide" chaconne from *Nach dir, Herr, verlanget mich*, BWV 150 (c.1707-08)
- Joseph Bodin de Boismortier: Neuf petites sonates et chaconne, for 2 cellos, op. 66
- Marc-Antoine Charpentier: Sans frayeur dans ce bois, H.467 for soprano and continuo
- François Couperin: "La Favorite, Chaconne a deux tems," Troisième ordre.
- George Frideric Handel: "Chaconne" from Suite in G minor for clavichord
- George Frideric Handel: "Chaconne" from the Terpsichore prologue added to the second revision of the opera *Il pastor fido*, HWV 8c (rev. 1734)
- George Frideric Handel: "Chaconne" from *Almira*
- Jacques Morel: Chaconne in E minor, for flute, viola da gamba, and basso continuo
- Jean-Philippe Rameau: "L'hymen—Chaconne", Scene VI from *Les fêtes d'Hébé* (1739)
- Tomaso Antonio Vitali: Chaconne in G minor for Solo Violin (dubious authorship)
- Sylvius Leopold Weiss: Ciacona in G minor

19th century

- Johannes Brahms: Symphony No. 4 in E minor, Op. 98, finale
- Heinrich Reimann: Ciacona in F minor, op. 32, for organ

20th century

- John Adams: second movement "Chaconne: Body Through Which the Dream Flows" from Violin Concerto (1993)
- Malcolm Arnold: second movement "Chaconne" from Recorder Sonata, Op. 41 (1953)
- Malcolm Arnold: second movement "Chaconne: Andante con moto" from Quintet For Brass, Op. 73 (1961)
- Béla Bartók: first movement, "Tempo di ciacona" from the Sonata for violin solo (1944)
- Howard Blake: Chaconne (from Lifecycle, sequence of 24 piano solos) (1975)
- Benjamin Britten: "Chacony", third movement of the String Quartet No. 2, in C (1946)
- Benjamin Britten: "Ciaccona", fifth movement of the Cello Suite No. 2 (1971)
- John Corigliano: *The Red Violin (Chaconne)* for violin and orchestra
- Johann Nepomuk David: *Chaconne* in A minor for organ (1933)
- Johann Nepomuk David: *Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland: kleine Chaconne* for organ
- Norman Dello Joio: *Variations, Chaconne, and Finale* for orchestra
- David Diamond: Chaconne, for violin and piano (1951)
- Cornelis Dopper: Ciaconna gotica (1920)
- Marcel Dupré: *Triptyque*, op. 51 (Chaconne, Musette, Dithyrambe), for organ
- Jean Françaix: *Chaconne* for harp and string orchestra (1976)
- Philip Glass: *Echorus* for two violins and string orchestra (1995)
- Philip Glass: Symphony No. 3, third, slow movement (1995)
- Philip Glass: Violin Concerto No. 1, second, slow movement (1987)
- Alexander Goehr: Chaconne, for organ (1985)
- Hans Werner Henze: *Il Vitalino raddoppiato: ciacona per violino soloista e orchestra da camera* (1977)
- Heinz Holliger: *Chaconne* for solo cello (1975)
- Gustav Holst: "Chaconne" from First Suite in E-flat major for Military Band (according to one writer, technically a passacaglia, but according to others, technically a chaconne)^[8]
- Arthur Honegger: *Chaconne de l'impératrice*, from the film music for *Napoléon* (1926–27)
- Ernst Krenek: *Toccata und Chaconne: über den Choral "Ja ich glaub an Jesum Christum"*, op. 13, for piano
- György Ligeti: *Hungarian Rock: Chaconne*, for harpsichord
- Frank Martin: Chaconne, for cello and piano (1931)
- Carl Nielsen: Chaconne, op. 32, for piano (1916–17)
- Henri Pousseur: *Chaconne* for solo violin
- Knudåge Riisager: *Chaconne*, op. 50, for orchestra
- Poul Ruders: *Chaconne* for solo guitar
- Franz Schmidt: *Chaconne* in C♯ minor, for organ. (1925) Arranged for orchestra (transposed to D minor) in 1931.
- Reginald Smith Brindle: *Chaconne and Interludes: (The Instruments of Peace III)*, for two guitars
- Leo Sowerby: *Chaconne*, for tuba and piano (1938)
- Leo Sowerby: *Canon, Chacony, & Fugue* for organ (1948)
- David Van Vactor: *Fantasia, Chaconne, and Allegro*, for orchestra
- Stefan Wolpe: *Dance in Form of a Chaconne* for piano (1941)

21st century

- Paulo Galvão: Chacoinas (2) in A minor for baroque guitar.
- Jennifer Higdon: second movement "Chaconni" from violin concerto (2008)
- Krzysztof Penderecki: *Ciaccona in memoria Giovanni Paolo II per archi* (for string orchestra) from *Polish Requiem* (added in 2005).
- Roman Turovsky: Chaconnes in C major, C minor and D minor for baroque lute.

References

- [1] Alexander Silbiger, "Chaconne", *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. S. Sadie and J. Tyrrell (London: Macmillan, 2001).
- [2] Percy Goetschius, *The Larger Forms of Musical Composition: An Exhaustive Explanation of the Variations, Rondos, and Sonata Designs, for the General Student of Musical Analysis, and for the Special Student of Structural Composition* ([New York]: G. Schirmer, 1915), 29 and 40.
- [3] Lucas, Clarence Lucas, 1908. *The Story of Musical Form* (The Music Story Series, edited by Frederick J. Crowest. London: The Walter Scott Publishing Co., Ltd.; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1908), 203.
- [4] Manfred Bukofzer, *Music in the Baroque Era* (New York: Norton, 1947), 42.
- [5] Alexander Silbiger, " Passacaglia and Ciaccona: Genre Pairing and Ambiguity from Frescobaldi to Couperin (<http://sscm-jscm.press.uiuc.edu/v2/no1/silbiger.html>)", *Journal of Seventeenth-Century Music* 2, no. 1 (1996).
- [6] Alexander Silbiger, "Chaconne" *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. S. Sadie and J. Tyrrell (London: Macmillan, 2001).
- [7] Händel, Georg Friedrich. "Chaconne," *Klavierwerke / Keyboard Works IV. Einzelne Suiten und Stücke / Miscellaneous Suites and Pieces. Zweite Folge / Second Part*. Herausgegeben von / Edited by Terence Best. Kassel: Bärenreiter, c1975, pp. 47-49.
- [8] Budd Udell, "Standard Works for Band: Gustav Holst's First Suite in E♭ Major for Military Band." *Music Educators Journal* 69, no. 4 (1982) page 28. (JSTOR subscription access) ([http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0027-4321\(198212\)69:4<27:SWFBGH>2.0.CO;2-Q](http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0027-4321(198212)69:4<27:SWFBGH>2.0.CO;2-Q)) - Pam Hurry, Mark Phillips, and Mark Richards, (<http://books.google.com/books?id=YIjzx6AoIvYC&printsec=frontcover&dq=heinemann+hurry&lr=&output=html>) (Oxford: Heinemann Educational Publishers, 2001. ISBN 0435812580) page 238. - Clarence Lucas, *The Story of Musical Form* ([http://books.google.com/books?id=CvAPAAAAYAAJ&pg=PR7&lpg=PR7&dq=clarence+lucas+1908+the+story+of+musical+form"&source=web&ots=lq3zIHrZNV&sig=X2rCZX6tL2t8ufEq2K2MFBnZILc&hl=en#PPP1,M1](http://books.google.com/books?id=CvAPAAAAYAAJ&pg=PR7&lpg=PR7&dq=clarence+lucas+1908+the+story+of+musical+form)) (The Music Story Series, edited by Frederick J. Crowest. London: The Walter Scott Publishing Co., Ltd.; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1908) page 203.

External links

- *Passacaglias and Chaconnes for Lute* (<http://polyhymnion.org/swv/ostinato.html>)

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