

Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

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Alessandro Marcello

Antonio Vivaldi

Ritornello

Henry Purcell

THE SPREAD OF "TONAL FORM"

Chapter: CHAPTER 5 The Italian Concerto Style and the Rise of Tonality-driven Form

Source: MUSIC IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

Having characterized the sequence-and-cadence model as a norm that would usher in an era of "common practice," we need to justify that remark by demonstrating its chronological and geographical spread. The chronological demonstration will emerge naturally enough in the course of the following chapters, but just to show how pervasive the model became within the sphere of Italian instrumental music, and how quickly it spread, we can sneak a peek at a concerto by a member of the generation immediately following Corelli's.

Alessandro Marcello (1669–1747) was a Venetian nobleman who practiced music as a *dilettante*—a "delighter" in the art—rather than one who pursued it for a living. His work was on a fully professional level, however, and achieved wide circulation in print. (His younger brother Benedetto, even more famous and accomplished as a composer, was also more prominent as a Venetian citizen, occupying high positions in government and diplomacy.) Marcello, like Corelli before him, was a member of the Arcadian Academy, and maintained a famous salon, a weekly gathering of artist-dilettantes where he had his music performed for his own and his company's enjoyment. It was for such a gathering that he composed his *Concerto a cinque* ("concerto scored for five parts") in D minor, which was published in Amsterdam in 1717 or 1718 and attracted the attention of J. S. Bach, who made it famous in an embellished transcription for harpsichord.

Although published only three or four years later than Corelli's *Concerti Grossi*, op. 6, Marcello's concerto belongs to a different type—one that much more closely resembles the type of concerto we know from the modern concert repertoire. Where Corelli's concerti were in essence amplified trio sonatas (and while such concerti continued to be written by many composers, particularly George Frideric Handel and his English imitators, long into the eighteenth century), Marcello's is modeled on the format of the contemporary *opera seria* aria, such as we encountered in the previous chapter. It is scored for a single solo instrument (replacing Corelli's "concertino"), in this case the oboe, accompanied by an orchestra (or *ripieno*, "full band") of string instruments that chiefly supplies ritornellos.

Concertos of this type usually dispensed with the opening "Preludio" of the Corellian model and consisted of three movements: fast ritornello movements at the ends, with a slow "*cantabile*" (lyrical accompanied solo) in between. This new genre of "solo concerto" seems to have originated in Bologna, at the Cathedral of San Petronio. Its earliest exponent was the violinist Giuseppe Torelli (1658–1709), a contemporary and rival of Corelli's, who led the Cathedral orchestra. Its "classic" exponent was Antonio Vivaldi (1678–1741), the outstanding Venetian composer of the early eighteenth century, to whom we will of course return.

Doubtless Marcello picked up the three movement concerto form from fellow-Venetian Vivaldi. The first movement of his oboe concerto is in a straightforward ritornello form akin to the opening section of a da capo aria. The last movement crossbreeds the ritornello framework with the binary dance form familiar to us from the Corelli "da camera" style. (Marcello, recall, wrote not for the church service but for his own aristocratic salon.)

Of particular interest is the structure of the main ritornello theme (Ex. 5-9a). It begins with a four-measure "head motive" over a bass that is clearly derived from the old "descending tetrachord" of chaconne and passacaglia fame. It ends, accordingly, on a half cadence. Ground basses remained popular in the Italian string repertory. The last sonata da camera in Corelli's opus 2, published in 1685, consisted of a single showy *ciaccona* over a descending tetrachord, and the most famous solo sonata in Corelli's opus 5, published in 1700, was a magnificent set of variations over the

eight-bar *folia* ground, one of the old dance “tenors” that went back to the sixteenth century. Corelli’s “La Folia” has remained a virtuoso warhorse—usually in modernized and “violinistically enhanced” transcriptions—to the present day.



fig. 5-4 Antonio Vivaldi, caricature by Pier Loene Ghezzi (the only authenticated life drawing of the composer).

All resemblance to the ground bass, however, ends with the fifth measure of Marcello’s ritornello. Instead of another four-bar phrase over the same bass, we now get a nine-bar monster consisting of four sequential repetitions of an angular scale-plus-arpeggio idea that unfolds over a single exact and complete circumnavigation of the circle of fifths, finally hooking up with a cadence formula that adds the “extra” ninth measure to its length. The ensuing oboe solo, a variation on the ritornello, reproduces and embellishes its harmonic structure: a four-bar approach to a half cadence followed by a full circle of fifths accompanying a series of melodic sequences (reduced this time to four measures by doubling the harmonic rhythm) and a concluding set of ascending sequences that reaches a cadence on III, the relative major.

A set of rising sequences, unlike the falling type that arises more or less straight-forwardly out of the circle of fifths, requires a different sort of harmonic support. The implied root movement is made explicit in the next oboe solo

(mm. 36–52), a fascinating interplay of melodic and harmonic contours (Ex. 5-9b). It begins with the usual four-bar “head,” followed by a sequential elaboration. The sequences in this case begin (mm. 36–41) by rising. The harmonies change bar by bar in a root progression that ascends by fourths and falls by thirds: F (III)–B \flat (VI)–G (IV)–C (VII)–A (V)–D (I). Immediately on reaching the original tonic, the circle of fifths kicks in and the sequences come tumbling down in double time (mm. 41–46), as if to remind us that rising is always more laborious than falling.

The image displays a musical score for the beginning of the Oboe Concerto in D minor, III, by Alessandro Marcello. The score is in 3/8 time and marked Presto. It features a five-staff arrangement: two treble clefs, two bass clefs, and a double bass clef. The music begins with a four-measure "head" followed by a sequential elaboration. The first system shows the initial rising sequence with dynamics (f) and a "Vc. solo" marking in the final measure of the second system.

ex. 5-9a Alessandro Marcello, Oboe Concerto in D minor, III, beginning

But notice that the rising progression is presented in such a way that if the “functional bass” notes were sampled at the bar lines beginning at m. 36, they would create a rising chromatic line that exactly reversed the old *passus duriusculus*, the chromatically descending groundbass tetrachord of old: (A)–B \flat –B–C–C \sharp –D. In effect we have a series of interpolated leading tones (again familiar from longstanding practice, in this case the downright ancient principles of *musica ficta*); and if we now interpret those leading tones within the nascent system of harmonic functions (i.e., as the thirds of dominant triads), we have a new principle—the “applied dominant”—that will emerge over the years as the primary means of harmonic and formal expansion within the tonal practice that is just now reaching full elaboration.

We are witnessing a truly momentous juncture in the history of harmony: the birth of harmonically controlled and elaborated form. In the Italian instrumental music of a rough quarter-century enclosing the year 1700, we may witness in their earliest, “avant-garde” phase the tonal relations we have long been taught to take for granted. And yet from the very beginning this avant-garde style of harmony was easily and eagerly assimilated, both by composers and by listeners. For composers it made the planning and control of ever larger formal structures virtually effortless. To listeners it vouchsafed an unprecedentedly exciting and involving sense of high-powered, *directed* momentum, and promised under certain conditions a practically visceral emotional payoff. The tonal system at once gave

composers access to a much more explicit and internal musical "logic" than they had ever known before, and also gave them the means for administering an altogether new kind of pleasurable shock to their audiences.

ascending sequence

descending

functional bass

F: I 6 6 F: vi
d: i

sequence

cadence

d: III
a: vi ii V [i ii V iv V] i

ex. 5-9b Alessandro Marcello, Concerto in D minor, III, mm. 36–52, analyzed to show *basse fondamentale*

These new powers and thrills made the new style virtually irresistible and assured its rapid spread. Our geographical witness to that spread can be Henry Purcell. Up to now we have viewed Purcell chiefly through a French-tinted lens, as befits a composer for the Restoration stage. He was equally receptive to the new winds blowing from Italy, however, and equally reflective of them, provided one looks for the reflection in the right place. That place, of course, would be string ensemble music, an area in which Purcell's art underwent an astoundingly quick and thorough transformation at very nearly the beginning of his career. Rarely can one trace so sudden a change of style, or be so sure about its cause.

Purcell was heir to the rich and insularly English tradition of gentlemanly ensemble music for viols that we visited briefly in chapter 3. His first important body of compositions, in fact, was a set of consort "fantazias" that he wrote in the summer of 1680, the year he turned twenty-one. They well exemplify the somewhat archaic imitative polyphony the English held onto so long into the seventeenth century—the "interwoven hum-drum" Roger North affectionately described in his memoirs of rural music-making.

Ex. 5-10, the opening "point" in one of Purcell's fantasies of 1680, will give us one last look at this style, particularly poignant in its peculiarly English harmonic intensity, replete with false relations of an especially dissonant kind (sevenths "resolving" to diminished octaves!) on practically every cadence. The timing of the entries on the principal motif (first heard in the "tenor"), their progress through the texture, and, most of all, their transpositions seem to be waywardness itself. It is hard to imagine the composer of this piece and the composer of Corelli's sonatas and concertos as contemporaries, or to believe that Corelli's first book of trio sonatas was published less than a year after Purcell's fantasies were composed.

[Andante]

The first system of the musical score consists of four staves. The top staff is in treble clef, and the bottom three are in bass clef. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and the time signature is common time (C). The music begins with a whole rest in the treble staff for the first three measures. In the fourth measure, the treble staff has a half note G4, a quarter note F4, and a quarter note E4. The bass staffs provide a harmonic accompaniment with various rhythmic patterns, including eighth and sixteenth notes, and some accidentals.

The second system of the musical score consists of four staves. The top staff is in treble clef, and the bottom three are in bass clef. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and the time signature is common time (C). The music continues from the first system. The treble staff features a melodic line with a half note G4, a quarter note F4, and a quarter note E4 in the first measure, followed by a half note D4 in the second measure. The bass staffs continue their accompaniment with various rhythmic patterns and accidentals.

ex. 5-10 Henry Purcell, “Fantazia 7” a 4, mm. 1–26

And yet hard on the heels of those fantasias, in 1683, Purcell published his own book of “Sonnatas of III Parts: Two Viollins And Basse: To the Organ or Harpsicord” that advertise his full capitulation to what old Roger North, who detested it, called the “brisk battuta” of the Italians.¹ *Battuta* is Italian for “beat,” and so it was evidently the fast tempi and the heavy regularity of its rhythm (or maybe just the professional virtuosity that it required) that seems to have affronted traditional English taste in the new Continental fashion. But Purcell, although only six years younger than North, had no such scruple about appropriating for himself and his countrymen “the power of the Italian Notes, or [the] elegancy of their Compositions,” as he put it in the preface to his collection.

The composer whose work Purcell chiefly aped in his trio sonatas was probably not Corelli (although Corelli’s first book of church sonatas would have been available to him) but rather one Lelio Colista (1629–80), an older Roman contemporary of Corelli’s, best known as a lutenist or “Theorbo man” (to quote an English traveler who heard him perform in church in 1661). His sonatas were never published and consequently fairly little known or admired —except, by chance, in England, where they circulated widely in manuscript. The third sonata from Purcell’s set is modeled closely on the church sonatas of Colista, and therefore (somewhat curiously, but characteristically for the island kingdom) preserves the new Italian style at a slightly earlier stage of development than Corelli had already achieved.

Notes:

(1) John Wilson, ed., *Roger North on Music* (London: Novello, 1959), p. 11.

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Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

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Fugue

Double fugue

THE FUGAL STYLE

Chapter: CHAPTER 5 The Italian Concerto Style and the Rise of Tonality-driven Form

Source: MUSIC IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

There is another element, besides its harmonically driven form, that defines the new Italianate style. The use of the old-fashioned term “Canzona” for the second movement in Purcell’s sonata (Ex. 5-11) is adopted directly from Colista, as are the movement’s form and texture, somewhat more thorough goingly and conservatively contrapuntal than the Corellian norm. It is a very competently crafted *fugue*, worked out with the perhaps excessive regularity and rigor one might expect to find in a self-conscious (and still youthful) imitator. But since it is the first fully developed fugue (or to be painstakingly accurate, the first fully developed specimen of what would later be called a fugue) to be encountered in this book, it is worth studying in some detail. In the description that follows, the standard modern terminology for the fugue’s components and events will be employed (and set off in italics), even though—like the word “fugue” itself—they are not strictly contemporaneous with the piece at hand.

The image displays a musical score for a piece titled "Canzona S". The score is written in 3/4 time and features three staves: a vocal line (Soprano), a keyboard line (likely harpsichord or spinet), and a figured bass line. The piece is divided into four systems, each containing three staves. The first system is labeled "Canzona S" and "CS 1". The second system is labeled "CS 2", "CS 1", and "CS 2". The third system is labeled "CS 1", "CS 2", and "CS 1". The fourth system is labeled "CS 1", "CS 2", and "CS 1". The figured bass line includes various figures such as "6 7 7 7 7 7 7 #6", "7 6 7 6 7 6 7 6 7 #6", "3 2 3 2 [3] 2 3 2 3 2 3 2 3", and "6 5 5 5 5 5 5 5 #". The score also includes dynamic markings like "S" and "CS 1", and various musical notations such as clefs, notes, rests, and accidentals.

17 *S* *Ep (cf CS 2)*

CS 1

S

6 4 3 6 4 3 6 6 5 4 3 6

21 *episode*

S

6 6 6 6 6 6 6 6 6 6 6 6 6 6

25 *S (stretto)*

S

S

7 6 4 6 6 6 6

28 *Adagio*

6 6 5 5 6 6 6 6 7 6 5 7 6 5 6 7 6

32

6 #6 4 6 6 6 6 6 #6 6 6 6 6 6 6 6 6

36

7 6 6 6 6 6 6 6 6 7 6

ex. 5-11 Henry Purcell, *Sonnatas of III Parts*, no. 3 in D minor, mm. 1–37

A fugue is like a single extended and colossally elaborated point of imitation from the older motet or canzona. There is a single main motive or theme, called the *subject*, on which the whole piece is based. In the opening section of such a piece, called the *exposition*, the subject is introduced in every voice. In the present example, this has been accomplished by the time the downbeat of the seventh measure is reached. First the subject is heard alone (though doubled by the organ continuo) in the first violin. Then the second violin plays the subject “at the fifth” (meaning a fifth up or, as here, a fourth down); when played at this transposition, it is called the *answer*. The counterpoint with which the first violin accompanies the answer (here, a chain of syncopations/suspensions) is called the *countersubject* (CS). Next to enter is the cello, playing the subject in its original form, though down an octave; hence the entering voices continually describe a quasi-cadential “there and back” alternation of tonic and dominant to lend the newly important sense of tonal unity to the exposition. When the third voice to enter plays the subject, the second voice shifts over to the CS (suitably transposed), and the first voice plays a second CS that harmonizes with both the other melodies. These fixed components of the texture are given analytical labels in Ex. 5-11: **S** (for subject, or when transposed to the “fifth,” the answer), **CS1** for the syncopated CS, and **CS2** for the second one.

By now, with all the voices in play, the exposition has performed its function and could end. But this fugue, as already noted, is very demonstratively, even compulsively worked out, and the composer is determined to display his complex of three voices in every possible permutation (for which reason this kind of extremely regular and thoroughgoing fugue is sometimes called a “permutation fugue”). Up to now the subject has always been found in the lowest sounding voice. And so in the seventh measure, still inexorably alternating subjects with answers, Purcell brings it back in the highest voice while keeping the two countersubjects as before.

The texture is now inverted, with subject above countersubjects rather than below. Thus, Purcell announces, this fugue is of the especially rigorous variety known as *double fugue* because it is written in “double”—that is, invertible—counterpoint. (As any student who has taken counterpoint knows, in order for counterpoint to be invertible it must conform to especially stringent rules of dissonance treatment.) This “double exposition” does not end until the subject (or answer) has circulated through the texture three times and been in every possible juxtaposition with the

other voices. It is in fact a triple exposition.

The exposition ends in m. 19 and is followed by what is called an *episode*, which simply means a stretch of music during which the subject is withheld. Even the episode is contrapuntally complex in this very determined fugue: a three-beat phrase in anapests (short–short–long) that on its repetitions cuts across the four-beat bar and is capriciously alternated with its inversion. Also playful (and welcome, in compensation for the dogged regularity of the exposition) is the episode's asymmetrical five-bar length.

The subject reappears in m. 24, still whimsically accompanied by the episode figure, now extended and continuous. When the answer comes in at m. 26 (top voice) Purcell pulls one last contrapuntal stunt: the other voices now pile in with overlapping entries on the subject and answer, so that every part is eventually playing some part of it at the same time. This foreshortening device is called the *stretto* (Italian for “straitened”—tightened or made stricter) and is a common way of bringing fugues to a close. (Strettos have to be worked out in advance while the subject is being cooked up; not every subject will produce one.) Another conventional touch is the concluding passage (or *coda*, “tail”) over a sustained dominant in the bass: the latter is known as a *pedal*, or “pedal point,” because the device originated in organ music, where the player produces it by literally planting a foot on the rank of tone-producing pedals with which large built-in church organs are equipped. It is during the pedal point, which projects the cadential harmonic function so forcefully, that Purcell again goes playful, this time with chromatically inflected lines that give a tiny, perhaps nostalgic, whiff of the expressive harmony so endemic to the older English style exemplified in his own fantasia of a few years earlier (cf. Ex. 5-10).

It is interesting to compare the “canzona” in Purcell's sonata with the other fugal movement, the fourth (Allegro), which bursts in upon the sarabande-like third movement without pause (Ex. 5-12). Its subject descends from the fifth (dominant) degree of the scale to the first, which calls for a “tonal answer” that in effect transposes the subject (once past the first note) up a degree, so that the V-I descent will be balanced by a complementary descent from I to V (covering a fourth, not a fifth). This movement, too, has a first countersubject in syncopations, producing suspensions. But whereas the suspensions in the second movement resolved the old-fashioned “intervallic” way (sevenths resolving to sixths over a stationary bass), the suspensions in the last movement are channeled—as in the newer, Corellian style—through the bounding circle of fifths. The sense of harmonic purpose, of activity at once more intense and more directed than ever before, was as great a stylistic breakthrough for Purcell as it was for every other composer who took it up.

And yet to us, at the other end of its history, it can sound, paradoxically enough, like a step backward. “Those weaned on Purcell's great Fantasias of 1680,” a recent commentator has observed, “with their superlative juxtaposing of archaic longings and innovative yearnings, might all too easily dismiss the composer's sonatas as formulaic and fashion-bound.”² But the familiar “tonal” formulas and patterns were what struck late seventeenth-century ears as innovative, just as the harmonic vagaries that can sound so delightfully unexpected and personal to us—even “other-worldly,” to quote the same critic—struck contemporary ears as familiar, hence entitled to what familiarity breeds.

Purcell was highly conscious that he was “advancing” the music of his homeland by bringing it into contact with the latest emanations from the continent. He underscored the point by retaining “a few terms of Art” from his Italian sources, namely the vocabulary of tempo and expression marks that are familiar to all musicians in the European literate tradition to this day.³ It was Purcell who in his preface to the 1683 *Sonnatas* first defined words like *Adagio*, *Grave*, *Largo*, *Allegro*, *Vivace*, and *Piano* for English-speaking players.

98 Allegro S

102 CS 1

S

7 7 42

106 CS 2

CS 1

S

7 7 2

11

ex. 5-12 Henry Purcell, *Sonnatas of III Parts*, no. 3 in D minor, m. 98–110

Notes:

(2) Jonathan Freeman-Attwood, review of Purcell, *12 Sonatas in Three Parts* (L'Oiseau-Lyre CD 444 499-2OH), *Gramophone*, April 1996, p. 67.

(3) Henry Purcell, preface to *Sonnatas of Three Parts: Two Violins and Bass, to the Organ or Harpsicord* (London, 1683); reprinted in facsimile in Purcell, *Works*, Vol. V (London, 1983).

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George Frideric Handel

Concerto: Origins to 1750

HANDEL AND “DEFAMILIARIZATION”

Chapter: CHAPTER 5 The Italian Concerto Style and the Rise of Tonality-driven Form

Source: MUSIC IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

Not that a great and practiced musical imagination could not work refreshing and fanciful changes on the new styles, and keep them fresh. Purcell in 1683 represented the first English adoption of the Corellian (or slightly pre-Corellian) style. It was the style itself that was then new. Merely using it, even at its most basic level, was an innovative act. In a later chapter we will take a long look at the work of George Frideric Handel, a naturalized Englishman who belonged to the generation of Corelli's or Purcell's sons and daughters, and who was one of the great representatives of the “High Baroque” style (as it is now so often called) that flourished, particularly in northern Europe, in the first half of the eighteenth century. It will be worthwhile at this point to have a preliminary look at Handel, who knew and played with the venerable Corelli during his apprentice years in Rome, to see what he did with the Corelli style in his set of “Twelve Grand Concertos,” opus 6, published in London in 1740 (more than a quarter of a century after Corelli's death), one of the very latest major collections of *Concerti Grossi*.

The seventh concerto grosso from the set is dated 12 October 1739 on its autograph manuscript. By Handel's day, and especially in England, the old distinction between church and chamber styles had become meaningless. The Anglican church service did not make room for sonatas or concerti *da chiesa*; instrumental chamber music was by definition secular entertainment. Handel's concerto has five movements, of which the first two, a kind of prelude and fugue, are a clear echo of the church style. Just as clearly, the last movement, a dance in binary form, echoes the chamber style.

The third and fourth movements, paired slow–fast like the first two, are played without repeats but go through an elaborate harmonic “round trip” such as one finds in binary movements. The Andante, with periodic returns of a rhythmically catchy opening melody in different keys (yet without any interplay of solo and tutti) seems to be a hybrid, combining the characteristic features of the ritornello style, typical of arias or concertos, with those of the dance, typical of suites. The whimsical, diverting quality of the whole concerto is most obviously suggested by the adoption of an English national dance, the hornpipe (also known, fittingly enough, as the “delight” or “whim”) for the concluding movement (Ex. 5-13). As danced in the eighteenth century, the hornpipe was a “longways country dance,” meaning (paradoxically) an urban, genteel couples dance in which the dancers assembled in long files. The rather complicated steps were adapted from an older solo dance often done competitively by sailors; the rhythms, as in Handel's adaptation, were often syncopated. Handel was surprising his English listeners and players with a delightful stylization of a dance they all knew “in situ,” extended delightfully (and somewhat ridiculously) to monumental length. Ex. 5-13 shows just the first half, allowing the first violin part and the bass to stand in for the four-part texture.

ex. 5-13 G. F. Handel, Concerto grosso in B-flat major, Op. 6, no. 7

The same whimsicality, the same aim to amuse, can be seen in the second, fugal movement of Handel’s concerto. Using a style that by then had long since become a standard procedure to which nobody paid much attention *qua* style, Handel subtly “defamiliarizes” it in order to produce the same kind of diverting piquancy Purcell could achieve simply by using the style when it was as yet unfamiliar. Consider first the one-note subject itself, a famous joke. The impression of mindless jabber, “put on” like a comic mask, is actually the means by which Handel exercises a subtle control over the texture of the fugue and keeps it lucid. The progressive rhythmic diminution from half notes to eighths that must run its course before the subject is allowed to quit its initial pitch, and the continuation of the eighth-note pulse into the sequential patterns of the countersubject insure that the subject’s rhythmic “head” in half notes will stand out against the eighth-note ground rhythm on its every entrance, wherever in the texture it may occur, and gives the composer an unusual freedom in placing or “voicing” surprising subject entries.

Another area of potential surprise is the timing of subject entries. We see an example of this within the first exposition (Ex. 5-14) in the little three-bar episode (on material derived from the countersubject) that breaks the implicit pattern defined by the second subject entry in mm. 9–11 and delays the third. Thereafter, the whole fugue consists of a game of hide-and-seek: when and where will the subject next turn up? The game is rendered all the more obviously (and amusingly) a game by the way episodes are made to “mark time” with static or obsessive

repetitions (at times virtually denuded of counterpoint) of the four-eighths motif first heard in the second violin at the beginning of the countersubject (m. 5).

Allegro

The first system of the musical score consists of six measures. It features two staves in the treble clef and two in the bass clef. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and the time signature is common time (C). The top two staves contain the primary melodic material, starting with a half-note chord in the first measure, followed by eighth-note patterns. The bottom two staves are mostly empty, with some rests.

The second system of the musical score consists of four measures. It continues the two-staff treble and two-staff bass layout. The top two staves show a continuation of the eighth-note motif from the first system, with some variations in rhythm and pitch. The bottom two staves remain empty with rests.

ex. 5-14 G. F. Handel, Concerto grosso in B-flat major, Op. 6, no. 7, Allegro, mm. 1–22

So in the hands of its ablest practitioners, a style that derives its identity and its strength from the regularity of its patterns is subjected to calculated disruptions that honor the patterns (as the saying goes) “in the breach,” and that turn “form” into a constant play of anticipations and (dis)confirmations. This process of setting up and either bearing out or letting down the listener’s expectations has quite recently been termed the “implication/realization” model of musical form, and has been the focus of much investigation by psychologists, who regard it as a relatively pristine embodiment of the learning (or “cognitive”) processes by which humans adapt to their environment.⁴

In the instrumental music of the early eighteenth century, the listener’s interest is engaged by these abstract processes of “conditioned response” as if in compensation for the absence of a text as cognitive focus. They brought about a virtual revolution in listening, in which the listener’s conscious mind was much more actively engaged than previously in these processes of forecast and delayed fulfillment, and in which the form may even be said to arise out of the play of these cognitive processes. When it was new, such abstract yet intensely engaging instrumental music seemed to some listeners to be very aggressive both in what it demanded from them in the way of active perceptual engagement, and in its effects on them in the way of intense passive experience.

One particularly uncomprehending listener, an aged French academician named Bernard le Bovier le Fontenelle (1657–1757), who was used to the idea of music not as abstract intellectual process but as “imitation” of feeling.

reacted to a bit of Italianate string music with the exasperated question, “Sonate, que me veux-tu?” which means “Sonata, what do you want from me?”⁵ He was not as uncomprehending as he thought. His indignation was aroused by his correct perception that the sonata wanted his active mental engagement. Music became a more strenuous experience but also a more powerful (and at the same time a more “autonomous”) one. And yet, as we have seen, the process of attending to such an autonomous musical structure can be endlessly diverting. Handel’s fugue, though far more sophisticated than Purcell’s, is also lighter—prankish rather than dogged.

Notes:

(4) The term is Leonard B. Meyer’s; for the most extensive treatment see Eugene Narmour, *The Analysis and Cognition of Basic Melodic Complexity: The Implication-Realization Model* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

(5) Quoted in Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Dictionnaire de musique* (Paris, 1768), p. 452.

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Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

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Johann Sebastian Bach

Toccatà

BACH AND “DRAMATIZED” TONALITY

Chapter: CHAPTER 5 The Italian Concerto Style and the Rise of Tonality-driven Form

Source: MUSIC IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

We can witness the new instrumental style at its most sublime, and experience its newfound power to deliver both intellectual gratification and a powerful emotional payoff, by stealing an advance look at the work of Handel’s exact contemporary, Johann Sebastian Bach. Bach’s impressive organ Toccata in F major—probably composed between 1708 and 1717 while Bach held the post of organist at the court chapel of Weimar (a town in Eastern Germany, then known as Saxony)—is in some ways an old-fashioned work, but in others it is downright prescient. A virtuoso showpiece for the organist, Bach’s Toccata belonged to an ancient tradition, one that we have traced back to the Gabriellis and Sweelinck at the end of the sixteenth century, and which lay behind the development of the Corellian “church sonata” as well. Toccatas, etymologically, were “touch pieces.” They foregrounded the playing process itself. And what could be more characteristic of the organ’s particular playing process than the activity of the player’s feet? It was in the fancy footwork that organ playing differed from the playing of any other instrument of the time, and Bach spotlights that footwork in various highly contrasting ways.

Manuale

Pedale

7

13

19

25

31

Musical score for measures 31-36. The system consists of three staves: a treble clef staff, a bass clef staff, and a lower bass clef staff. The treble staff contains a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes. The middle bass staff contains a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth notes. The lower bass staff contains a simple bass line of quarter notes.

37

Musical score for measures 37-42. The system consists of three staves. The treble staff has a melodic line with some rests. The middle bass staff continues the rhythmic accompaniment. The lower bass staff continues the simple bass line.

43

Musical score for measures 43-48. The system consists of three staves. The treble staff has a melodic line with some rests. The middle bass staff continues the rhythmic accompaniment. The lower bass staff continues the simple bass line.

49

Musical score for measures 49-54. The system consists of three staves. The treble staff has a melodic line with some rests. The middle bass staff continues the rhythmic accompaniment. The lower bass staff continues the simple bass line.

55

Musical score for measures 55-60. The system consists of three staves. The treble staff has a melodic line with some rests. The middle bass staff continues the rhythmic accompaniment. The lower bass staff continues the simple bass line.

ex. 5-15a J. S. Bach, Toccata in F, BWV 540, mm. 1–82

The opening section of the piece (Ex. 5-15a) is accompanied through most of its duration by what may well be the longest “pedal point” ever written, one that dramatically advertises the derivation of what is often thought of as an abstract harmonic device from the practical technique of organ playing. The organist plunks his foot down on the F pedal and thereby opens up a flue pipe through which air will rush as long as the pedal is depressed. The low F thus produced can last indefinitely; Bach lets it sound for the two minutes or so that it takes to execute the canon that runs up above between the two keyboards (or manuals). The organ is the only instrument capable of sustaining a note of such a length without any break. The implied harmonies that it supports—notably the dominant—are often dissonant with respect to it, but Bach concentrates for the duration of the pedal on the tonic (I) and subdominant (IV) harmonies (both of which contain the F) and on the tonic-plus-E \flat , which functions as an “applied dominant” of B \flat (“V of IV”).

Bach lets the canon in the manuals peter out in mm. 53–54 without any real cadence, whereupon the pedals take over with one of the most extended solos for the feet that Bach or any organ virtuoso ever composed. It lasts 26 measures, roughly half the length of the preceding canon-over-pedal, and consists entirely of sequential elaborations of the canon’s opening pair of measures, itself already a sequential elaboration of a “headmotif” with a characteristic contour consisting of a “lower neighbor” and its resolution, followed by a consonant leap down, a larger consonant leap up, and a return to the original note. The blow-by-blow description is cumbersome indeed, but the contour itself

is instantly apprehensible. (Indeed, the sense of triple meter in the piece depends on our apprehending it, since the rhythm is just an undifferentiated stream of sixteenth notes, and the organ cannot produce accentual stresses; thus the only thing that can serve to define the measure as a perceptual unit here is the recurrent pitch contour and its sequential repetitions.)

A 26-measure section or “period” comprising nothing except sequential repetitions of a single pitch contour is a quintessential display of the technique of melodic elaboration and form-building known as *Fortspinnung* (“spinning out”). This handy term was actually coined (by the Austrian music historian Wilhelm Fischer) in 1915, but it very neatly defines the techniques of melodic elaboration that arose with the concerto style as a sort of by-product of the circle of fifths and the other standard patterns of chord succession that we have already observed, the melody arising (for the first time in the history of musical style) out of an essentially harmonic process.

In Bach’s long passage of pedal *Fortspinnung*, the circle of fifths acts as a long-range modulatory guide, within which many smaller cadences and sequences take their place. The long-range workings of the circle of fifths can best be gauged by noting accidentals as they occur. The first accidental to appear (in m. 61) is E \flat , which has the effect, here as previously, of invoking the scale of B \flat major (IV), which in turn identifies A as leading tone (“vii of IV”). When E-natural occurs (in m. 66) as an accidental that explicitly cancels the E \flat , it asserts its function as leading tone to the original tonic (I). The next accidental to appear (m. 70) is B-natural, the leading tone of C (V), and the next one after that (m. 78) is F \sharp , the leading tone of G (ii, but retaining the B-natural so as to turn ii into “V of V,” and with the E \flat reinstated to suggest—colorfully but falsely, as it turns out—a cadence on C minor).

The whole passage may be summed up harmonically in terms of a slowly unfolding circle of ascending fifths: B \flat (IV)–F (I)–C (V)–G (ii/V of V), all preparing the bald cadence formula on C (V) in mm. 81–82. That the first explicit cadence in the piece takes place so late is a testimony to the efficacy of the *Fortspinnung* technique in organizing vast temporal spans. And the same vast span is now replayed on C (V), replete with 54-measure canon-over-pedal and mammoth pedal solo, now expanded to 32 measures in length.

Again a cadence on C (V) is elaborately prepared and the same cadential formula is invoked. But this time the cadential preparation is detached from the resolution and repeated no fewer than seven times (Ex. 5-15b), dramatically delaying the arrival of the keenly anticipated stable harmony (the “structural downbeat,” as it is often called). When the C major triad in root position is finally sounded, it can no longer be merely taken for granted as the inevitable outcome of a standard harmonic process. The process of delay has “defamiliarized” it and made it the object of the listener’s keenly experienced desire.

Bach’s Toccata is one of the earliest pieces to so dramatize the working out of its form-building tonal functions, adding an element of emotional tension that is inextricably enmeshed in its formal structure. The listener’s active engagement in the formal process is likewise dramatized. The listener’s subjective reaction to the ongoing tonal drama is programmed into the composition. Subjectivity, one may say, has been given an objective correlate. It even makes a certain kind of figurative sense to ascribe the desire for resolution to the notes themselves, objectifying and (as it were) acting out the listener’s involvement.

So far we have had a decisive tonal movement from I (the opening pedal) to V (the long-delayed and intensified arrival at m. 176, shown in Ex. 5-15b). We may now expect the usual leisurely return, by way of intermediate cadences on secondary degrees. And that is what we shall get—but not without dramatic withholdings and ever more poignant delays. The measures that immediately follow Ex. 5-15b unfold a sequential progression along the by-now-familiar descending circle of fifths: C (V)–F (I)–B \flat (IV)–E (vii $^{\circ}$)–A (iii). The chord on A is expressed as a major triad, connoting an applied dominant to D (vi), just where one might expect the “medial cadence” on the way back to the tonic.

169

ex. 5-15b J. S. Bach, Toccata in F, BWV 540, mm. 169–76

That expectation will indeed be confirmed, but only after a really hair-raising strategy of delay shown in Ex. 5-15c has run its course. At the short range the A major chord (“V of vi”) is allowed to reach its goal (m. 191), but the D minor chord is immediately given a major third, a seventh, and even a dissonant ninth, turning it in its turn into an applied dominant (“V of ii”) along the same circle of fifths. The G minor chord (ii) is also manipulated and compromised as a goal, first by harmonizing the G as part of a diminished seventh chord (m. 195), then as part of a “Neapolitan sixth” such as we observed in the last chapter in connection with Alessandro Scarlatti (m. 196). The Neapolitan sixth always acts as a cadential preparation to the dominant, and so the A returns (m. 197) with its previously assigned function (“V of vi”) intact. Again (mm. 197–203) we get the elaborately stretched-out preparation we heard previously in mm. 169–76. But this time, the already much-delayed resolution is thwarted (m. 204) by what was probably the most spectacular “deceptive cadence” anyone had composed as of the second decade of the eighteenth century.

188

194

200

207

213

ex. 5-15c J. S. Bach, Toccata in F, BWV 540, 188–219

A deceptive cadence (as it is called in today’s analytical language) is not just any avoided or interrupted cadence. In a deceptive cadence the cadential expectation is partially fulfilled, partially frustrated, producing an especially pungent effect. Most often it is the leading tone that is resolved, the fifth-progression that is evaded; the most common way of achieving this is to substitute a submediant chord for the tonic (Ex. 5-15d).

a. authentic deceptive authentic deceptive

V - I V - vi V - i V - VI

c.f.

m. 203 204 205 206 207 208 209 210 213 217 218

V N6 N6 V V i

fundamental bass

V VI II \flat V I

interpolation reduced to circle of fifths (wheels within wheels)

VI II \flat V i

ex. 5-15d Ordinary deceptive cadences in D major and D minor

Bach does something similar, but much spikier. The leading tone, C \sharp , is resolved to D, the expected tonic, in m. 204; but the bass A proceeds, not along the circle of fifths to another D, but rather descends a half step to A \flat , clashing at the tritone with the soprano D. And the tritone is harmonized with one of the most gratingly dissonant chords available in the harmonic language of Bach's time: a dominant seventh in the "third inversion" (also known as position), in which the bass note is the seventh of the chord, dissonant with respect to all the rest.

The chord is a chord in drastic need of resolution, and Bach resolves it in timely fashion. That local resolution, however, takes him far afield of his long-range harmonic goal. It is to the Neapolitan sixth chord. Bach first "normalizes" the Neapolitan harmony by treating it as part of a standard sequential progression (mm. 204–209) similar to the one noted in Marcello's oboe concerto, but made stronger by putting all the applied dominants in position. In m. 210 the Neapolitan is regained, reiterated, and (after yet another set of feints) finally directed "home" to the long-awaited D in mm. 217–19. The process of delay, from the initial adumbration of the cadence to its ultimate completion, has unfolded over an unprecedented span of 32 intensely involving measures, a passage full of finely calculated yet overwhelmingly powerful harmonic jolts and thrills.

The Toccata's progress from this point to completion can be briefly summarized. In the section that follows Ex. 5-15c, the familiar cadential formula is used to navigate through a complete circle of fifths and beyond, to a cadence on A minor (iii). Over the next 62 measures, an almost identical harmonic process (dramatically extended by the use of the deceptive cadence) is used to establish G minor (ii). From there to the end it is just a matter of holding off the inevitable V–I that will complete the main cadential circle of fifths. and with it the piece. Once achieved, the

dominant pedal is held for twenty-three measures while the hands on the manuals go through a frenzy of sequential writing that descends, ascends, descends again, and ascends again in ever-increasing waves. The pedal gives way to a series of cadential formulas that only reach the home key after yet another eruption, like the one in Ex. 5-15c, of the bizarre deceptive cadence to the " of the Neapolitan," a chord of crushing disruptive force that makes the final attainment of the tonic seem an inspiring, virtually herculean achievement.

The Toccata in F is thus a tour de force not only of manual (and pedal) virtuosity but of compositional virtuosity as well. Bach deserves enormous credit for sensing so early the huge emotional and dramatic potentialities of the new harmonic processes, and for exploiting them so effectively—at first, presumably, in thrillingly experimental keyboard improvisations of which the "composed" Toccata is the distilled residue. By harnessing harmonic tension to govern and regulate the unfolding of the Toccata's form, he managed to invest that unfolding-to-completion with an unprecedented psychological import. Thanks to this newly psychologized deployment of harmonic functions—in which harmonic goals are at once identified and postponed, and in which harmonic motion is at once directed and delayed—"abstract" musical structures could achieve both vaster dimensions and a vastly more compelling emotional force than any previously envisioned. Harmonic tension could from now on be used at once to construct "objective" form and "subjective" desire, and to identify the one with the other.

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Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

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Antonio Vivaldi

Concerto: Origins to 1750

Vivaldi: Appointment at the Pietà

Ritornello

VIVALDI'S FIVE HUNDRED

Chapter: CHAPTER 5 The Italian Concerto Style and the Rise of Tonality-driven Form

Source: MUSIC IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

The main protagonist and establisher of the three-movement soloistic concerto, as already mentioned, was Antonio Vivaldi, a Venetian priest who from 1703 to 1740 supervised the music program at the Pio Ospedale della Pietà, one of the city's four orphanages. The word *ospedale* (cf. hospital), originally meant the same thing as *conservatorio* (whence “conservatory”); both were institutions that maintained and educated indigent children (orphans, foundlings, bastards) at public expense, and both emphasized vocational training in music. The Pietà housed only girls, and thanks to Vivaldi's extraordinary talent and energy, its program was outstandingly successful. The Sunday vespers concerts performed by its massed bands and choirs of budding maidens under Vivaldi's direction were regarded as something of a phenomenon and became one of the city's major tourist attractions.

Travelers' reports are split between those that emphasized the young performers' allure, and those that emphasized the fiery demeanor of *il prete rosso*, “the red-haired priest” who presided, when present, with his violin at the ready. “There is nothing so charming,” wrote Charles de Brosses, a French navigator, “as to see a young and pretty nun in her white robe, with a sprig of pomegranate blossoms over her ear, leading the orchestra and beating time with all the grace and precision imaginable.”⁶ By contrast, Johann Friedrich Armand von Uffenbach, a German music patron who caught Vivaldi in action at the opera house, wrote that his playing “really frightened me.”⁷

Vivaldi's official duties at the Pietà were the spur that caused him to produce concertos in such fantastic abundance. The most popular Venetian composer of opera and oratorio in his day, he was superbly prolific in those genres as well, and internationally famous. But it is with his five hundred surviving concertos (out of who can only guess how many composed?) that his name is irrevocably linked. About 350, almost three quarters, feature a single solo instrument, and of these about 230 (almost half the total) are for the violin, which was not only Vivaldi's own instrument but the one taught to the largest number of girls at the Ospedale. Runner-up, with thirty-seven concertos, is (perhaps unexpectedly) the bassoon. There are also numerous concertos for flute, for oboe, for cello, and occasionally for rarer instruments, including some (like the mandolin and the “flautino” or flageolet) that were most often used in folk or street music—that is, by nonliterate musicians.

Some three hundred Vivaldi concertos are found today in unique manuscript copies, many of them autographs, housed since the 1920s in the National Library of Turin in northern Italy. They were deposited there by the musicologist Alberto Gentili, who tracked them down and purchased them for the library with funds provided by a local banker named Roberto Foà and a textile manufacturer named Filippo Giordano. These manuscripts had belonged to Count Giacomo Durazzo (1717–94), the Imperial (Austrian) ambassador to Venice, who later served as the “intendant” or impresario-in-charge of the Vienna opera. It is thought that he purchased the collection—either in Venice or in Vienna, where Vivaldi happened to die in 1741 while visiting on operatic business—intact from the composer's estate, and that they represented the actual performing repertoire of the Pietà at the time of his death.

These are the concertos, in other words, that were expressly composed for the outstanding girl musicians—the *figlie privilegiate*, as they were called—whom Vivaldi trained and led. Published in the aftermath of World War II as a national treasure in a huge series of editions prepared by a leading Italian composer of the day, Gian Francesco Malipiero, these previously unknown Vivaldi concertos were a major spur to the so-called “postwar Baroque boom” that awakened active performing and recording interest in many forgotten repertoires of “early music.” They thus

have significance in the history of the twentieth century's musical life as well as the eighteenth's.

A concerto in C major for bassoon from the Foà deposit can serve as well as any (and better than most) in the somewhat imaginary capacity of "typical" Vivaldi concerto. It once carried the misleadingly low number 46 in the catalogue of Vivaldi's works by Marc Pincherle, whose listing, once standard, was based on keys (starting with C); more recently it has carried equally misleading high number 477 in the catalogue of Peter Ryom, whose listings, based on instrumentation, are now supplanting Pincherle's. In any case it well exemplifies the basic principles of concerto-writing that were à la mode in the early eighteenth century, largely because of Vivaldi's commanding example.

Johann Joachim Quantz, a flutist and composer who in 1752 published (in the modest guise of a flute tutor) the most compendious encyclopedia of mid-eighteenth-century musical practice, called this type of concerto "a *serious* concerto with a large accompanying body" (the italics were his).⁸ What made it so was the nature of the ritornello, "majestic and carefully elaborated in all the parts," in Quantz's words, and containing a variety of melodic ideas. In its full form this complex ritornello functions as a frame, launching the movement and bringing it to an end, as in the main ("A") section of a da capo aria. Elsewhere, as Quantz describes (or for any composers reading, prescribes), "its best ideas are dismembered and intermingled during or between the solo passages."

Allegro

Bn.

I. (f)

Vns. (f)

II. (f)

Vla. (f)

Vc. (f)

Cb. (f)

ex. 5-16 Antonio Vivaldi, Concerto for Bassoon in C major, F VIII/13, mm. 1–12

The twelve-measure ritornello that introduces our bassoon concerto (Ex. 5-16) consists of four distinct melodic ideas. The first (mm. 1–4) is “spun out” of a turn figure and a rising third. The second (mm. 4–7) is a spaciouly textured derivation from our old acquaintance the *passus duriusculus*, the chromatic descent from tonic to dominant degrees, presented not as a bass but as a treble line in the first violins, played against a bass consisting of ostinato repetitions of the opening turn figure. (Mentally connect the first and last notes in every group of four eighths in the first violin part and the chromatically descending line will emerge to the eye as clearly as it does in performance to the ear; the octave Gs in between double the viola’s “pedal.” This kind of “compound” melodic line, containing two registrally separated “voices” in one, was common in Italian string music and in later music, including a lot of Bach’s, that imitated it.) The third characteristic phrase in the ritornello (mm. 8–10) is marked by a radically contrasting texture, called *all’unisono* because it consists of unharmonized octaves. The fourth and last (mm. 10–12) is a cadential motive that (like the second phrase) makes a playful feint toward the parallel minor.

If we label these component phrases for reference with the letters from A to D, we can easily compare the partial (or “dismembered”) internal repetitions of the ritornello with the full statement at opposite ends of the movement. In the first of them, the opening phrase (A) is balanced against a consequent phrase that telescopes truncated versions of B and D into a single four-bar span. The next internal ritornello consists of phrase A paired with phrase C, the one omitted in the previous statement. The next time A is followed by fuller statements of B and D. The last internal

ritornello is brief; it consists of nothing more than the second half of phrase B (in the major mode rather than the minor).

Each of these ritornellos is built on a different scale degree. Only the outer (full-blown) statements are based on the tonic; their harmonic stability reflects their important role in articulating the form of the piece. In between we get statements on V, vi, iii (the remotest point, articulated by the lengthiest internal ritornello), and (briefly) V again, providing a smooth “retransition” to the home key. The whole trajectory comprises a strongly directed tonal sequence embodying a characteristic “binary” or “round trip” motion: the initial swing to the dominant is prolonged through a deceptive cadence and a “regression” along the circle of fifths (that is, a move farther away from the tonic) before the dominant is picked up again and directed home: I–V–[vi–iii]–V–I.

Thus the sequence of ritornellos defines and unifies the structure of the concerto movement both melodically and tonally. In between come the solos, alternating not only with the ritornellos but with the “ripieni” or backup players who play them. In one sense—the public or “external” sense—the virtuosic solo turns are what the concerto is all about. It is the soloist one pays to hear, after all. In another sense—the structural or “internal” sense—the solos have a much less important role, merely providing modulatory transitions from one “tonicized” scale degree on which ritornellos are played to the next. They are the exact functional equivalent of the “episodes” between the expositions in a fugue.

In contrast to the ripieni, who are confined to repetitions (whether full or partial) of the ritornello, the soloist never repeats. Each episode (summarized in Ex. 5-17a-e) presents a new hurdle, progressively more challenging in its figuration: arpeggios, fast slurred scales, wide-leaping triplets, etc. Thus the typical concerto movement is a fascinating interplay of the fixed and the fluid: one body of players is confined to a single idea, while the other (here a group of one, plus continuo) is seemingly unconstrained in its spontaneous unfolding. One group only repeats, the other never repeats. One “role” is dramatically subordinate but structurally dominant, the other is dramatically dominant but structurally subordinate. Their effect together is one of complementation, of disparate parts fitting harmoniously into a satisfying, functionally differentiated whole, all of it grounded by the constant auxiliary presence of the basso continuo, everyone’s companion and aide.

ex. 5-17a Antonio Vivaldi, Concerto for Bassoon in C major, F VIII/13, mm. 12–14

ex. 5-17b Antonio Vivaldi, Concerto for Bassoon in C major, F VIII/13, mm. 30–25

ex. 5-17c Antonio Vivaldi, *Concerto for Bassoon in C major*, F VIII/13, mm. 44–48

ex. 5-17d Antonio Vivaldi, *Concerto for Bassoon in C major*, F VIII/13, mm. 162–165

ex. 5-17e Antonio Vivaldi, *Concerto for Bassoon in C major*, F VIII/13, mm. 74–78

All of this suggests a social paradigm or metaphor. Indeed, the concerto form has always been viewed, in one way or another, as a kind of microcosm, a model of social interaction and coordinated (or competitive) activity. That is one of the things that has always invested its seemingly abstract patterns with “meaning” and fascination for listeners. And that fascination, along with the fascination of tonal relations with their strong metaphorically “forward” drive to completion, is what allowed “large” forms of instrumental music to emerge and to assume a place of central importance in European musical culture.

The remainder of the concerto amplifies the sense of kinship with the *opera seria*. The broad (*largo*) second movement, scored for soloist and continuo alone, is a study in “florid” song (*coloratura*) over a static bass—a veritable *aria d’affetto* (or, more precisely, an *arietta*, in view of its binary form). The final movement, another

ritornello-style composition, brings the ripieno back. Less “serious” than the first movement, it sports a ritornello theme with only two distinct parts and a pervasive *all’unisono* texture. As might be expected, the two halves of the theme are complementary or, more precisely, reciprocal. Tonally, they reproduce the functions of the binary form: the first phrase makes a half cadence on the dominant, the second a full cadence on the tonic. Melodically, too, the phrases are complementary. Both feature rushing scales, first ascending then descending. Taken as a three-part whole, the concerto reproduces in its texture the effect of a typical da capo aria: outer sections with ritornellos frame a contrasting middle section in which the soloist is accompanied by the continuo instruments only.

For an idea of Vivaldi not at his most typical but at his most bizarre or “frightening,” consider one of his most unabashedly extravagant compositions, the Concerto in B minor for four violins. Its only rival in excess might be the concertos “per l’orchestra di Dresda,” which Vivaldi wrote on order to show off the famous orchestra maintained by the Elector of Saxony Friedrich August II, whose titles included that of King of Poland, and who kept up a “royal” court in Dresden; this concerto had a colossal concertino consisting of six instruments: an especially showy violin part for the Elector’s “concertmaster” Johann Georg Pisendel, Vivaldi’s former pupil, along with two oboes, two recorders, and bassoon.

The concerto for four violins is written in what was then a very unusual, indeed hardly used key that was reserved for very special expressive—or (in this case) impressive—effects. In all of Vivaldi’s vast instrumental output the key of B minor turns up only twelve times. One piece that uses it is a sombre “Sinfonia al Santo Sepolcro” (“Sinfonia to be played before the holy tomb”). The four-violin concerto likewise exploits what was thought of as the harsh or crazed quality of the key for expressive effect. Originally played (one may assume) at the Ospedale by the master and three of his most headstrong *figlie* to an enthusiastic reception, the work is a veritable juggernaut. The four soloists are forever intruding with calculated unruliness on the ripieni and on one other, co-opting portions of the ritornellos, vying obsessively for the last word, forcing the music out of its harmonic sanctuaries, so to speak, and into the flux.

Very significantly, the ritornellos are highly truncated affairs, split between sequential patterning that allows harmonic “movement,” and highly repetitive ostinato patterning (especially in the outermost ritornelli) that builds tension by inhibiting harmonic movement. The soloists jack up the tension further by dividing the ripienists’ eighth notes into relentless chains of sixteenths that are maintained as a virtual rhythmic constant. The combination of this insistent rhythmic commotion with a harmonic plan that alternates between harmonically pent up, static repetition (as in Ex. 5-18a) and periodic harmonic discharge (as in Ex. 5-18b) produces an almost unbearably exciting impression of fluctuating tension and release. The solidification of tonal routines and the forms accommodating them have given the composer access to a kind of musical galvanism, resulting in a newfound ability to shock, startle, and manipulate the responses of the audience.

Which of course makes one wonder about the kind of expression audiences might have given their responses at the time. One of the most striking things we found when looking in the last chapter into the mores of the *opera seria* was the spontaneity and the uninhibitedness of the audience response, so unlike the behavior of “classical” audiences today. We might also reflect on the fact that interactive instrumental music—the “concertato” principle, if you will—is still practiced today as a contemporary art in various forms of “nonclassical” music. Audiences still tend to react to these musics, whether improvised (as in jazz) or memorized and reproduced (as in “heavy metal” and other forms of instrumental rock), with an unrestrained, demonstrative enthusiasm that recalls the behavior of eighteenth-century opera audiences. It is probable, therefore, that Vivaldi’s concertos were greeted by their intended audience with the kind of intense reflex response one can find now only at pop performances. The sense of occasion thus created would go a long way toward explaining the extraordinary demand these pieces excited in their time. The immediacy of audience response quickens awareness of what is being responded to. If every solo brings (or fails to bring) applause, players are stimulated to take risks in hopes of keeping the noisy feedback coming.

To gain the full flavor of a Vivaldi concerto, then, it is probably not enough to listen to even the most aggressive performance. One must imagine an equally aggressive audience—a house full of shouting, clapping, stamping listeners, and the effect their demonstrations of approval may have had on the performers. (One doesn’t have to work hard to imagine such a thing; any rock video will provide a living example.) The decorous audience behavior first demanded by composers and performers of instrumental music in the nineteenth century can cast a real pall on music written earlier, to say nothing of those who play it.

Notes:

(6) Charles de Brosses, *Lettres familières sur Italie*, quoted in Marc Pincherle, *Vivaldi*, trans. Christopher Hatch (New York: Norton, 1962), p. 19.

(7) Eberhard Preussner, *Die musikalischen Reisen des Herrn von Uffenbach* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1949), p. 67; trans. Piero Weiss, in P. Weiss and R. Taruskin, *Music in the Western World*, 2nd ed., p. 200.

(8) Johann Joachim Quantz, *On Playing the Flute*, trans. Edward R. Reilly (New York: Schirmer, 1975), p. 311.

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Antonio Vivaldi

Vivaldi: Instrumental music

“CONCERTI MADRIGALESCHI”

Chapter: CHAPTER 5 The Italian Concerto Style and the Rise of Tonality-driven Form

Source: MUSIC IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

The image displays a musical score for Antonio Vivaldi's Concerto for Four Violins, Op. 3, no. 10, I, mm. 37-39. The score is in G major and 3/4 time. It features four violins and a basso continuo. The first three measures show a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes and quarter notes, with trills in the first and third measures of the first violin part. The score is marked with a forte (f) dynamic.

ex. 5-18a Antonio Vivaldi, Concerto for Four Violins Op. 3, no. 10, I, mm. 37–39

During his lifetime, the Concerto for Four Violins was one of Vivaldi's best known works, thanks to its publication in his earliest concerto collection, *L'estro armonico* (roughly, “Music Mania”), op. 3, issued in Amsterdam in 1711. This

book, actually printed (like most ensemble publications of the time) as a set of partbooks without score, traveled far and wide, spreading Vivaldi's fame and making his music a model to many a farflung imitator (including J. S. Bach, who made a boisterous arrangement of the Concerto for Four Violins for four harpsichords). It was followed by several other partbook collections bearing fanciful promotional titles: *La stravaganza*, *La cetra* ("The lyre"), and the biggest seller of all, *Il cimento dell'armonia e dell'invenzione* (something like "The trial of musical skill and contrivance"), op. 8, a book of twelve concerti that came out in 1725 and made a sensation thanks to the first four items it contained.

The image displays a page of a musical score, likely for a concerto by Vivaldi, starting at measure 68. The score is arranged in a system of ten staves, grouped into four sections of two staves each. The top two staves are in the treble clef, and the bottom four staves are in the bass clef. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The score features various dynamics, including *(f)* (forte) and *(Tutti)*. The notation includes eighth and sixteenth notes, rests, and slurs. The first system shows a melodic line in the upper treble staff and a supporting line in the lower bass staff, with other staves providing harmonic support. The second system continues the melodic development, with a prominent *(f)* marking. The third system shows a change in the melodic line, and the fourth system concludes the page with a *(Tutti)* marking.

The image shows a page of musical notation for Antonio Vivaldi's Concerto for Four Violins, Op. 3, no. 10, I, mm. 68-72. The score is written for four violins and a basso continuo. The key signature is G major (one sharp) and the time signature is 3/4. The notation includes various rhythmic values, slurs, and articulation marks. A 'Solo' marking is visible in the lower right of the score.

ex. 5-18b Antonio Vivaldi, Concerto for Four Violins Op. 3, no. 10, I, mm. 68–72

These four concerti, originally written for a foreign patron of Vivaldi's, the Bohemian count Wenzel von Morzin, were arranged in a set called *Le quattro stagioni*, "The Four Seasons." Accompanied by explanatory sonnets that spelled out their imagery, they were inventively detailed evocations or "imitations" of nature as manifested (respectively) in spring, summer, autumn, and winter—and (perhaps more significantly) of the sensory and emotional responses the seasons inspired. The delight audiences took from the very beginning in the composer's powers of musical description is reflected in the popularity the *Seasons* already enjoyed in the eighteenth century, a popularity that crossed all national boundaries. Today, thanks to countless recordings, the set is practically synonymous with the composer's name.

In France, where descriptive music had an especially strong tradition, and where one of the earliest important public concert series (the *Concert spirituel*) got under way exactly in the year of the *Seasons*' publication, these concerti, particularly Spring (*La primavera*), became the very cornerstone of the emerging "standard repertory." In Italy, too, the *Seasons* put all the rest of Vivaldi in the shade. In 1761, only a couple of decades after the composer's death, the playwright and librettist Carlo Goldoni found it necessary to remind his readers that the famous violinist who composed *Le quattro stagioni* had also written operas.

La primavera quickly became the most popular one of the lot, and so it has remained. It was arranged for solo flute

without accompaniment by none other than Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and even as a motet (for the Concert spirituel) by the French composer Michel Corrette, who simply superimposed choral parts declaiming the words of the psalm *Laudate Dominum* (“Praise ye the Lord”) over Vivaldi’s instrumental parts.

As a look at the first movement of *La primavera* will show, the concerto form, with its constant and fluid components, proved easy to adapt to illustrative or narrative purposes. (From here on we can use the literary critic’s word *mimesis*—Greek for “imitation”—to encompass the gamut of illustrative or narrative functions.) Here are the first and second quatrains of the accompanying sonnet, corresponding to the movement in question:

A *Giunt’è le primavera e festosetti*

B *La salutan gli augei con lieto canto,*

C *E i fonti allo spirar de’ Zeffiretti*

Con dolce mormorio scorrono intanto.

D *Vengon coprendo l’aer di nero amanto*

E lampi, e tuoni ad annuntiarla eletti

E *Indi, tacendo questi, gli augelletti*

Tornan di nuovo al lor canoro incanto.

[Spring has come, and merrily the birds salute it with their happy song. And the streams, at the breath of little Zephyrs, run along murmuring sweetly.

Then, covering the air with a black cloak, come thunder and lightning, as if chosen to proclaim her; and when these have subsided, the little birds return once more to their melodious incantation.]

The letters running down the left margin are original. They mark the exact spots in the score to which the words refer—or rather, the exact spots where the music is designed to mime the words in question. There is no question, then, as to the composer’s exact intentions. The imitations are obvious and hardly need pointing out; and yet it will be worth our while to consider the precise relationship at various points between the musical and verbal imagery.

Letter **A** corresponds to the ritornello (Ex. 5-19a), which (as befits its mimetic character) is rather unusual. Instead of the usual thematic complex there is a simple bouncy tune in binary form—an imitation folk song, as it were, whose implied words, as if sung by some implied rustics who will actually appear and dance in the last movement, are suggested by the sonnet’s first line. The nature of the mimesis here is “affective,” as one might find in the ritornello of a “happy” aria. Its periodic returns continually reinforce the overall mood of rejoicing at spring’s arrival.

The remaining images, **B** through **E**, correspond exactly to the four episodes that come between the ritornelli. Letter **B**, the singing of the birds (Ex. 5-19b), is rendered in the most straightforward way that music, the “art of combining sounds,” has at its disposal: *onomatopoeia*, direct “sound-alike” imitation. Birdsong had indeed long been a violinistic stock-in-trade, to the point where fastidious fiddlers like Francesco Geminiani, a pupil of Corelli who worked in England and wrote a famous treatise on violin playing, were fed up with it. In a celebrated bilious aside, Geminiani complained that “imitating the Cock, Cuckoo, Owl, and other Birds...rather belongs to the Professors of Legerdemain and Posture-masters [i.e., magicians and charlatans] than to the Art of Musick.”⁹ He wrote this in 1751, twenty-six years after Vivaldi’s *Seasons* had begun circulating in print and sounding forth from concert stages in France and England, and the composer of *La primavera* was surely one of the prime offenders.

Allegro

Solo Vln. *(f)* *p*

Vln. I *(f)* *p*

Vln. II *(f)* *p*

Vla. *(f)* *p*

Vc. *(f)* *p*

Cb. *(f)* *p*

ex. 5-19a Antonio Vivaldi, *La primavera* (Op. 8, no. 1), I, mm. 1–3

Canto dè gl'uccelli

15 Canto dè gl'uccelli *(f)* *p*

Canto dè gl'uccelli 1 Solo *(f)*

Canto dè gl'uccelli 1 Solo *(f)*

17 Canto dè gl'uccelli *(f)* *p*

ex. 5-19b Antonio Vivaldi, *La primavera* (Op. 8, no. 1), I, mm. 15–18

Letter C, the episode of the brook and breezes (Ex. 5-19c), takes us back to a venerable “trope,” or mimetic convention, whereby water is evoked by means of a rising-and-falling contour that suggests its wavelike motion. The technical name for this trope is *metonymy*, the representation of an object through one of its attributes. Such effects were a stock device for “word painting” in sixteenth century madrigals, and “madrigalism” would not be a bad term to use to characterize Vivaldi’s mimetic devices as well, despite the transfer to the instrumental medium.

The image shows two systems of musical notation for Antonio Vivaldi's *La primavera*. The first system, starting at measure 37, shows a violin part with a rhythmic eighth-note pattern, a piano part with a similar pattern, and a basso continuo part with a steady eighth-note accompaniment. The second system, starting at measure 39, shows the continuation of these parts, with the piano part featuring some chromatic movement and the basso continuo part maintaining its rhythmic pattern.

ex. 5-19c Antonio Vivaldi, *La primavera* (Op. 8, no. 1), I, mm. 37–41

Using it would signal the easily overlooked, somewhat paradoxical fact that to incorporate mimesis into an instrumental concerto was actually to fall back on an old practice, one that the new Italian instrumental genres were widely perceived as threatening. (Recall old Fontanelle and his lugubrious plea, “Sonate, que me veux-tu?”) Vivaldi was aware of this. He himself once used the term *concerto madrigalesco* to denote a piece in somewhat archaic style that used the kind of purple expressive chromatic harmonies the old madrigalists had formerly used to “paint” emotively laden words.

If we adapt the term to cover other kinds of word-painting as well, then *Le quattro stagioni* are also *concerti madrigaleschi*, and so are quite a number of other famous Vivaldi concerti, including *La tempesta del mar*, the item that immediately follows the Seasons in Vivaldi’s opus 8, which “paints” a storm at sea, or again the eighth concerto in the book, called *La caccia*, which incorporates hunting signals (and which has vocal antecedents going all the way back to the fourteenth century).

What all this shows once again, and it is something never to forget, is that new styles and genres do not actually replace or supplant the old in the real world, only in history books. In the real world the new takes its place alongside the old and, during the period of their coexistence, the two are always fair game for hybridization.

To return to our catalogue: letter **D**, the sudden storm (Ex. 5-19d), juxtaposes low *tremolandi* for the ripieni, mimicking thunder, with high scales that depict lightning.

Tuoni
Vengon coprendo l'aer di nero amanto

45

E lampi, e tuoni ad annun.

46

ex. 5-19d Antonio Vivaldi, *La primavera* (Op. 8, no. 1), I, mm. 45-46

Canto d'uccelli
Indi, tacendo questi, gli Augelletti

60

1 Solo

Tornan di nuovo al lor canoro incanto

62

tr

1 Solo

1 Solo

ex. 5-19e Antonio Vivaldi, *La primavera* (Op. 8, no. 1), I, mm. 60–65

Thunder, like birdsong, is onomatopoeia—a natural for music. But how can music imitate lightning, which is a visual, not an aural phenomenon? Again by means of metonymy: the adjectives one might use to describe the violin scales—bright, quick, even “flashy”—apply to lightning as well; the shared attributes are what link the images. Following the storm, the ritornello takes on its minor-mode coloration, as if an affective reflection on the spoiling of the day.

Letter E, the birds’ return (Ex. 5-19e), is the masterstroke: the way the solo violins steal in diffidently on chromatic scale fragments (yes, the *passus duriusculus*), as if checking out the weather before resuming their song, adds a “psychological” dimension to the onomatopoeical. This is no longer the work of a professor of legerdemain or a posture-master but the work of an expert musical dramatist. And that is the other obvious resonance that lies behind Vivaldi’s mimetic practices: the opera house, where winds and storms, birds, rustic song, and all the rest were regularly evoked and compared—in the ritornelli of “simile arias”—with dramatic situations and the emotions to which they gave rise.

Notes:

(9) Francesco Geminiani, *The Art of Playing on the Violin* (London, 1751), p. 1.

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Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

CHAPTER 6 Class of 1685 (I)

Careers of J. S. Bach and G. F. Handel Compared; Bach's Instrumental Music

Chapter: CHAPTER 6 Class of 1685 (I)

Source: MUSIC IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

CONTEXTS AND CANONS

The year 1685 is luminous in the history of European music, because it witnessed the birth of three of the composers whose works long formed the bedrock of the standard performing repertoire, or “canon,” as it crystallized (retrospectively) in the nineteenth century. In fact, the three composers in question—Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750), George Frideric Handel (1685–1759), and Domenico Scarlatti (1685–1757)—were for a long while the three earliest composers in active repertory, and so the number 1685 took on the aspect of a barrier, separating the music of common listening experience from a semiprehistoric repertoire called “early music” (or “pre-Bach music” as it was once actually termed), of concern only to specialists.

The contents, indeed the very existence, of this book show that this barrier has softened considerably, perhaps (some might argue) to the point of nonexistence. Concert life has been enriched by many performing artists and ensembles who confine themselves to music earlier than that of the class of 1685. Excellent recordings of such music abound. It is widely studied, analyzed, and critiqued. It has become familiar to a degree that would have been unthinkable even half a century ago. And yet artists who perform this music still specialize in it, and one aspect of the popularization of “pre-Bach” music has been an effort to reclaim the class of 1685 as specialist repertoire, which paradoxically means separating it from the “standard performing canon as crystallized in the nineteenth century” and placing it in the “pre-Bach” category.

Now we are apt to find Bach, Handel, and Scarlatti performed on the resurrected instruments of their time, not the standard instruments of today, by performers who have made a specialized study of the conventions that governed the performance practices of the early eighteenth century, and who are keen to emphasize the differences between those conventions and those to which “modern” listeners have become accustomed. The newfound familiarity of “early music” has led paradoxically to an effort to “defamiliarize” (or even “re-defamiliarize”) it. This is something that happened in the twentieth century, and so the reasons for it are best studied as part of the history of twentieth-century music.

The formation (or “canonization”) of the old performing repertory was something that happened in the nineteenth century, and so, it follows, the reasons for *it* are best studied as part of the history of nineteenth-century music. (The revival of Bach, whose music had temporarily fallen out of use except as teaching material, is an important and revealing part of that story.) And yet there were good reasons—“objective” reasons, one could argue—why the music of the class of 1685 became the foundation stone of the standard repertory once it was formed, and why even today their music (plus a few later rediscoveries like Vivaldi’s *Four Seasons*) remains the earliest music that nonspecialist performers and “mainstream” performing organizations like choral societies and symphony orchestras routinely include in their active repertoires.

There is also the earliest music that today’s concertgoers and record listeners are normally expected to “understand” without special instruction, partly because general music pedagogy is still largely based on their work. No child learns to play the violin without encountering Vivaldi, or the piano without encountering Bach and (if one gets serious) Scarlatti. As soon as one is old enough to participate in community singing, moreover, one is sure to meet Handel.

The main reasons for this were broached in the previous chapter. These composers were the earliest to inherit from the Italian string players of the seventeenth century, and they magnificently enlarged upon a fully developed “tonal”

idiom. From the same Italian virtuosi they also inherited a standardized and highly developed instrumental medium—the “ripieno” string band or orchestra, to which wind and percussion instruments could be added as the occasion demanded. The new harmonic idiom and the new instrumental media acted symbiotically to foster the growth of standard instrumental and vocal-instrumental forms of unprecedented amplitude and complexity, and these were the forms on which the later standard repertory rested.

It follows, then, that the works of the class of 1685 that loom largest in the standard repertory will be those that coincide with, or that can be adapted to, standard performing media and esthetic purposes. Those of their works that are apt to be familiar today will therefore represent only a portion of their outputs, and not necessarily those portions considered most important or most characteristic by the composers themselves or by their contemporaries. *Opera seria*, the reigning genre of their day, has long dropped out of the repertoire. Therefore much of the music that both Handel and Scarlatti regarded as the most important music of their careers has perished from active use, while a lot of music that they regarded as quite secondary (Scarlatti’s keyboard music, Handel’s suites for orchestra) is standard fare today. Bach, who never even wrote an opera, was an altogether atypical and marginal figure in his day. Seeing him, as we do, as being a pillar of the standard performing repertory means seeing him in a way that his contemporaries would never have understood.

Thus to see Bach, Handel, and Scarlatti as standard repertory composers is to see them in a historical context that is not theirs. It will be our job to view them in their own historical context as well as in ours. The most fascinating historical questions about their work will be precisely those that concern the relationship between the two contexts. The most surprising aspect of the comparison will be the realization that Bach and Handel, whom we regard from our contemporary vantage point as a beginning, were regarded more as enders in their own day: outstanding late practitioners of styles and genres that were rapidly growing moribund in their time.

It was their very “conservatism,” paradoxically enough, that later made them “canonical.” The styles that supplanted theirs were destined to be ephemeral. Meanwhile, Handel’s conservative idiom chanced to appeal to conservative members of his contemporary audience—and as we shall see, these members constituted the particular social group that inaugurated the very idea of “standard” or “timeless” repertory. It was logical that Handel’s music should have been the earliest beneficiary of that concept.

With Bach the situation was more complicated. He came back into circulation, and achieved a posthumous status he never enjoyed in life, because the conservative aspects of his style—in particular, his very dense contrapuntal textures and his technique of “spinning out” melodic phrases of extraordinary length—made his music seem weighty and profound at a time when the qualities of weightiness and profundity were returning to fashion (and, as we shall see, served political and nationalistic purposes as well).

A mythology grew up around Bach, according to which his music had a unique quality that lifted it above and beyond the historical flux and made it a timeless standard: the greatest music ever written and (ideologically far more significant) the greatest music that would or could ever be written. That myth of perfection begot in its turn a myth of music history itself. It was given an elegant and memorable expression by the great German musicologist Manfred Bukofzer (1910–55). “Bach lived at a time when the declining curve of polyphony and the ascending curve of harmony intersected, where vertical and horizontal forces were in exact equilibrium,” Bukofzer wrote, adding that “this interpenetration of opposed forces has been realized only once in the history of music and Bach is the protagonist of this unique and propitious moment.”¹

There was indeed a unique moment of which Bach was the protagonist. It took place, however, not during Bach’s lifetime but in the nineteenth century, when the concept of impersonally declining and ascending historical “curves” was born. It was a concept born precisely out of the need to justify Bach’s elevation to the legendary status he had come to enjoy as the protagonist of an unrepeatable, mythical golden age and the fountainhead of the Germanic musical “mainstream.” The “equilibrium” and “interpenetration” of which Bukofzer wrote, and to which he assigned such a high value, were qualities and values created not by Bach but by those who had elevated him. The *history* of any art, to emphasize it once again, is the concern—and the creation—of its receivers, not its producers.

Notes:

(1) Manfred F. Bukofzer, *Music in the Baroque Era* (New York: Norton, 1947), p. 303.

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George Frideric Handel

Johann Sebastian Bach

CAREERS AND LIFESTYLES

Chapter: CHAPTER 6 Class of 1685 (I)

Source: MUSIC IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

Bach and Handel were born within a month of one another, about a hundred miles apart, in adjoining eastern German provinces (then independent princely or electoral states). Handel, whose baptismal name was Georg Friederich Händel, was born on 23 February, in Halle, one of the chief cities in the so-called March of Brandenburg (a “march” being a territory ruled by a Margrave). Bach came into the world on 21 March a little to the south and west, in the town of Eisenach in Thuringia, a province of Saxony. Because of their nearly coinciding origins and their commanding historical stature, Bach and Handel are often thought of as a pair. In most ways, however, their lives and careers were a study in contrasts.

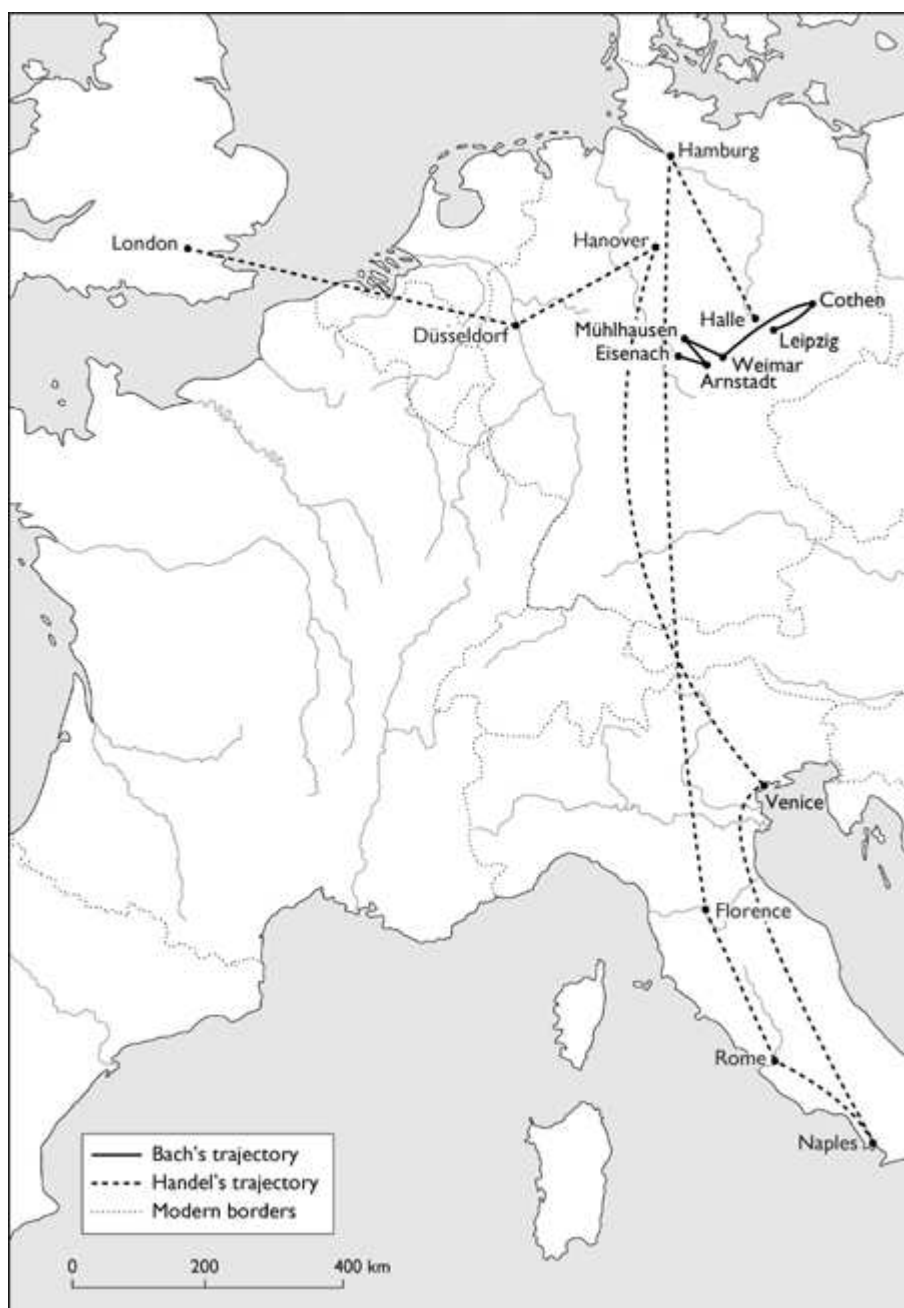


fig. 6-1 J. S. Bach's and G. F. Handel's career trajectories.

Handel spent only the first eighteen years of his life in his native city, where he studied with the local church organist, Friedrich Wilhelm Zachow, and attended the university. In 1703 he moved to Hamburg, the largest free city in northern Germany, which had a thriving opera house maintained by the municipal government and supported by the local merchants. There he played harpsichord (continuo) in the orchestra and composed two operas for the company. Having found his *métier* in the musical theater, Handel naturally gravitated to Italy, the operatic capital of the world. He spent his true formative years—from 1706 to 1710—in Florence and Rome, where he worked for noble and ecclesiastical patrons and met and played with Alessandro Scarlatti, Corelli, and other luminaries of the day, and where he was known affectionately as *il Sassone*, “the Saxon,” meaning really “the Saxon turned Italian” in the musical sense. In 1710 he became the music director at the court of George Louis, the Elector of Hanover, one of the richest German rulers. There, Handel had to assimilate the French style that all the German nobles affected in every aspect of court life, including court music.

The great turning point in Handel's life came in 1714, when his employer, without giving up the Electoral throne in Hanover, was elected King George I of England. (Queen Anne had died without a living heir and George Louis, as the great-grandson of King James I, was the closest Protestant blood claimant to the English throne.) George I never learned to speak English and was personally unpopular in England. He continued to spend much or most of his time

in Hanover, leaving the running of the English government largely to his ministers of state, chief among them Robert Walpole, the powerful Prime Minister.

Handel had actually made his English debut as an opera composer before George's accession to the throne. With the King a virtual absentee ruler, his court composer was left remarkably free of official duties, and gained the right to act as a free agent, an independent operatic entrepreneur on the lively London stage. Over the rough quarter century between 1711 and 1738, Handel presented thirty-six operas at the King's Theatre in the London Haymarket (with a few, toward the end, at Covent Garden, which is still called the Royal Opera House), averaging four operas every three years. Acting at once as composer, conductor, producer, and, eventually, his own impresario, he made a legendary fortune, the first such fortune earned by musical enterprise alone in the history of the art. (Palestrina also died a very rich man, but his fortune came from his wife's first husband's fur business.)

Beginning in the 1730s, operatic tastes in London began to catch up with the continent. A rival company, the Opera of the Nobility, managed to engage the latest Italian composers and (far more important) the services of the castrato singer Farinelli (see chapter 4), around whom a virtual cult had formed. After a few seasons of cutthroat competition, both Handel and his competitors were near bankruptcy, and Handel was forced out of the opera business. With his practically incredible business sense he divined a huge potential market in English oratorios: Biblical operas presented without staging, along lines already familiar to us from the Lenten work of Roman composers such as Carissimi.

Handel's adaptation of this old-fashioned genre was really something quite new: full-length works in the vernacular rather than Latin, without a narrator's part, but with many thrilling choruses, sometimes participating in the action, sometimes reflecting on it ("Greek chorus" style) to represent as a collective entity the pious yet feisty nation of Israel, with which the musical public in England—a public of "self-made men," aristocrats of wealth and opportunity, not birth, exulting in England's mercantile supremacy—strongly identified.



fig. 6-2 J. S. Bach (?) at age thirty. Oil portrait by Johann Ernst Rentsch (ca. 1715), at the Municipal Museum of Erfurt.

Though ostensibly religious in their subject matter, the subtext of Handel’s English oratorios—twenty-three in all, produced between 1732 and 1752—was stoutly nationalistic. It was the first important body of musical works motivated by national-ism—a nationalism in which the composer, a naturalized British subject who had benefited greatly from his adopted country’s economic prosperity and the opportunities it offered, enthusiastically shared—just as England, since the “revolutions” of the mid-and late seventeenth century, was the first country larger than a city state to identify itself as a nation in the modern sense of the word: a collectivity of citizens.

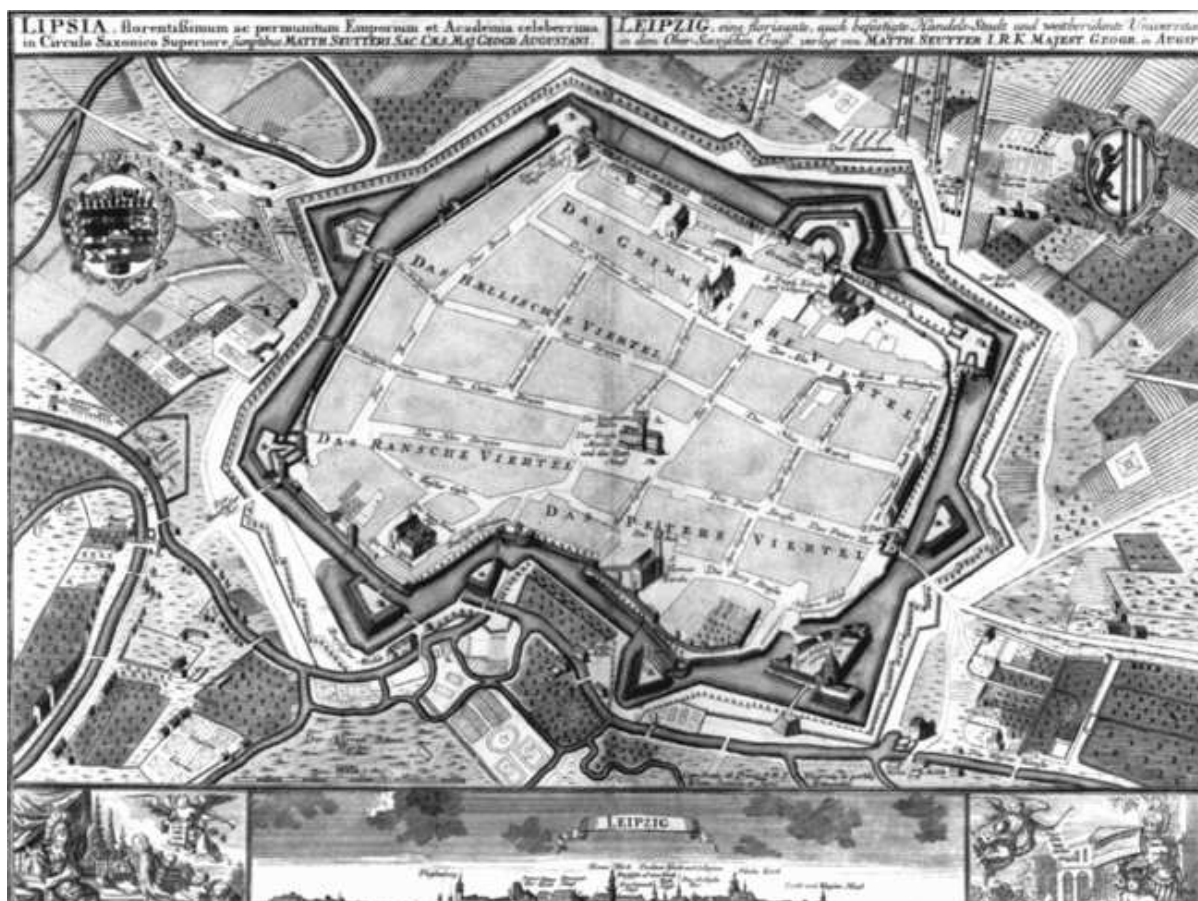


fig. 6-3 A bird's-eye view of Leipzig in 1712. St. Thomas Church, where Bach would find employment eleven years later, stands by the south wall at right. The churches of St. Paul and St. Nicolai, where he also supervised musical performances, are at the other end of town.

Handel's was thus the exemplary cosmopolitan career of the early eighteenth century, a career epitomized by his operatic "middle period," in which a German-born composer made a fortune by purveying Italian-texted operas to an English-speaking audience. Handel's style was neither German nor Italian nor English, but a hybrid that blended all existing national genres and idioms, definitely including the French as well. France was the one country where Handel, though an occasional visitor, never lived or worked; but its music, an international court music, informed not only the specifically courtly music that he wrote for his kingly patron but the overtures to his oratorios as well, which paid tribute to the "Heavenly King." Handel was the quintessential musical polyglot and the consummate musical entrepreneur. He commanded "world" (that is, pan-European) prestige. He has been a role model to "free market" composers ever since.



fig. 6-4 St. Thomas Square, Leipzig, in an engraving by Johann Gottfried Krüger made in 1723, the year of Bach's arrival. The church is at right; the school, where Bach lived and worked, is at left.

Johann Sebastian Bach never once left Germany. Indeed, except for his student years at Lüneburg, a town near Hamburg to the north and west, his entire career could be circumscribed by a small circle that encompassed a few east German locales, most of them quite provincial: Eisenach, his Thuringian birthplace; Arnstadt, where he served between 1703 and 1707 as organist at the municipal Church of St. Boniface; Mühlhausen, where he served at the municipal Church of St. Blasius for a single year; Weimar, where he served the ducal court as organist and concert director from 1708 to 1717; Cöthen, a town near Halle, Handel's birthplace, where he served as Kapellmeister or music director to another ducal court from 1717 to 1723; and finally Leipzig, the largest Saxon city (but not the capital), where he served as cantor or music director at the municipal school attached to the St. Thomas Church from 1723 until his death.



fig. 6-5 Interior of St. Thomas Church, with a view of the organ loft.

One of the larger German commercial cities even in Bach's day, Leipzig was nevertheless only a fraction of London's size and far from a cosmopolitan center. Still, it was a big enough town to have sought a bigger name than Bach as its municipal cantor. He was chosen only after two more famous musicians, Georg Philipp Telemann (1681–1767) and Christoph Graupner (1683–1760), had declined the town's offer in favor of more lucrative posts (in Hamburg and Darmstadt, respectively). One of the Leipzig municipal councillors grumbled that since the best men could not be had, they would have to make do with a mediocrity. Bach, for his part, felt he had been forced to take a step down the social ladder by going from a Kapellmeister's position at Cöthen to a cantorate at Leipzig. Until age put him out of the running, he repeatedly sought better employment elsewhere, including the electoral court at Dresden, the Saxon capital. Leipzig was the best he could do, however, and Bach was the best that Leipzig could do. Neither was very happy with the other.

Bach's, then, was the quintessential "provincial" career—humble, unglamorous, workaday. He remained for life in the musical environment to which he had been born, and which Handel quitted at his earliest opportunity. Handel had an unprecedented, self-made, entrepreneurial career that brought him glory and a very modern kind of personal fulfillment. Bach's, by contrast, was entirely predefined: it was the most traditional of careers for a musician of his habitat and class. For a musician of exceptional talent it was downright confining.

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ROOTS (DOMESTIC)

Chapter: CHAPTER 6 Class of 1685 (I)

Source: MUSIC IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

It was as “predefined” as that because J. S. Bach happened to come from an enormous clan or dynasty of Lutheran church musicians dating back to the sixteenth century. So long and firmly associated was the family with the profession they plied that in parts of eastern Germany the word “Bach” (which normally means “brook” in German) was slang for musician. The *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* lists no fewer than eighty-five musical Bachs, from Veit Bach (ca. 1555–1619), a baker from Pressburg (now Bratislava in Slovakia) who enjoyed a local reputation for proficiency on the cittern (a plectrum-plucked stringed instrument related to the lute and the mandolin), down ten generations to Johann Philipp Bach (1752–1846), court organist to the Duke of Meiningen.

Fourteen members of the family were distinguished enough as composers to earn biographical articles in the dictionary. They include two of Johann Sebastian Bach’s uncles (Johann Christoph and Johann Michael), three of his cousins (Johann Bernhard, Johann Nicolaus, and Johann Ludwig), four of his sons (Wilhelm Friedemann, Carl Philipp Emanuel, Johann Christoph Friedrich, and Johann Christian), and his grandson Wilhelm Friedrich Ernst (1759–1845, son of Johann Christoph Friedrich), who died childless and extinguished his grandfather’s line.

The outward shape of Johann Sebastian Bach’s career did not differ from those of his ancestors and contemporaries, and was far less distinguished than those of his most successful sons, Carl Philipp Emanuel and especially Johann Christian, whom we have already met briefly as a globe-trotting composer of *opera seria*. Most of the elder Bachs were trained as church organists and cantors. That training included a great deal of traditional theory and composition, and as church musicians the elder Bachs were expected to turn out vocal settings in quantity to satisfy the weekly needs of the congregations they served.

The greatest composers of this type in the generations immediately preceding Bach—or at least the ones Bach sought out personally and took as role models—were three: Georg Böhm (1661–1733), whom Bach got to know during his student years at Lüneburg and whose fugues he particularly emulated; the Dutch-born Johann Adam Reincken (1643–1722), a patriarchal figure who had studied with a pupil of Sweelinck, and who died in his eightieth year; and, above all, Dietrich (or Diderik) Buxtehude (1637–1707), a Dane who served for nearly forty years as organist of the Marienkirche in the port city of Lübeck, one of the most important musical posts in Lutheran Germany.

Within that cultural sphere Buxtehude’s fame was supreme, and he received numerous visits and dedications from aspiring musicians, including both Handel (who came up from Hamburg in 1703) and Bach (who took a leave from Arnstadt to make a pilgrimage on foot to Buxtehude in the fall and winter of 1705–1706). According to a story related by one of his pupils in a famous obituary, the aged Reincken, having heard Bach improvise on a chorale as part of a job audition, proclaimed the younger man the torchbearer of the old north-German tradition: “I thought this art was dead,” the patriarch is said to have exclaimed, “but I see that in you it lives!” The story may well be apocryphal, but it contains an important truth: Bach did found his style on the most traditional aspects of north German (Lutheran)

musical culture—a culture that was by most contemporary standards an almost antiquated one—and brought it to a late and (in the eyes of some of his contemporaries) virtually anachronistic peak of development. The keyboard works he composed early in his career while serving as organist at Arnstadt and Weimar show this retrospective side of Bach most dramatically.



fig. 6-6 Johann Adam Reincken, engraving after a portrait by Gottfried Kneller.

One such apprentice piece, a harpsichord sonata in A minor, was based on a *sonata da camera* by Reincken himself, originally published in 1687 when Bach was two. Reincken had scored the piece for a trio sonata ensemble of two violins and continuo, enriched by a viola da gamba part that sometimes doubled the basso continuo line, sometimes embellished it, and sometimes departed from it to add a fourth real part to the texture. This kind of saturated texture was very much a German predilection and harks back to the full polyphony of the *stile antico*. Another Germanic trait was the sheer length of Reincken’s fugal subjects, a length achieved by the use of very long measures (meter being the most note-heavy meter in general use) and through devices of *Fortspinnung* or “spinning out” such as we have already associated in the previous chapter with Bach.

In Ex. 6-1, the first section of Reincken’s last movement, a gigue in typical fugal style, is juxtaposed with Bach’s

reworking. It is a true emulation: not just an imitation, not just an homage, but an effort to surpass. One way in which Bach sought to accomplish this was by a sheer increase in size—in two dimensions. Reincken's nineteen measures are swollen to thirty, and his three-voiced exposition is augmented by a fourth fugal entry in Bach's version. At a time when many composers—especially composers of opera—were pruning and simplifying their styles in the interests of directness of expression, Bach remained faithful to an older esthetic tradition, seeking instead a maximum of formal extension and textural complexity. Throughout his life he was famed for the density of his music—sometimes praised for it, sometimes mocked.

At the same time, Bach managed, by varying the texture and pacing the harmony, to give his fugal exposition a much shapelier, more sharply focused design than Reincken's, despite the increase in length and (so to speak) in girth. At the beginning, Bach allows the initial exchange of subject and answer to take place without accompaniment, dispensing with Reincken's bass line as if getting rid of clutter. Then he gives greater point to the cadence at the end of the subject (m. 3) by spinning the sequence down as far as the leading tone, where Reincken had marked the end by repeating the approach to the tonic pitch.

This sharpening of tonal focus could be thought of as a modernizing touch: a response to the newly focused tonal style that was emanating from Italy, and that had quickly established itself, for musicians of Bach's generation, as a norm. Indeed, Bach greatly intensifies the harmony both in color and in "functionality," accompanying Reincken's long sequences of three-note descents with explicit circle-of-fifths harmonizations that sometimes (as in the full-textured "fourth entrance" in mm. 11–13) go into a sort of chromatic overdrive thanks to the use of secondary or "applied" dominants. For the rest, Bach expands the length of the exposition by devising an "episode" motive consisting of a decorated suspension chain (first heard in m. 7 between the two subject/answer pairs) that is finally brought rather dramatically into contrapuntal alignment with the subject on its last appearance.

Both Reincken's and Bach's versions are followed a couple of measures into the second section before Ex. 6-1 breaks off, to show the way in which both composers, following an old tradition, invert the subject to complement its initial statement. Here, too, Bach managed to outdo Reincken by building the inverted exposition from the bottom up instead of repeating the original top-down order of entries, thus achieving inversion, as it were, on two compositional levels at once.

Devices like these, and competition in their ingenious application, were standard operating procedure for church organists, who learned to do such things extemporaneously. More than anything else, they hark back to the learned artifices and contrivances of the *stile antico*. Bach delighted in these erudite maneuvers that he learned in his prentice years, employed them in every genre, and in his last years brought them to a peak of virtuosity that has been regarded ever since as unsurpassable. His son Carl Philipp Emanuel recalled that when listening to an organist improvise, or even when hearing a composed fugue for the first time, his father would always try to predict all the devices that could be applied to the subject, taking special pleasure in being surprised by one that he had failed to predict, and, contrariwise, reproaching the player or composer if his expectations went unmet.

Gigue
Presto

The first system of the musical score for 'Gigue Presto' consists of four staves. The top staff is in treble clef with a 12/8 time signature, containing a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes. The second and third staves are empty. The bottom staff is in bass clef with a 12/8 time signature, containing a bass line with eighth and sixteenth notes. Below the bottom staff are the following fingering numbers: 6 7 5, 6 6 5 6, 6, 6, 6 6 6, 6 6 4.

The second system of the musical score for 'Gigue Presto' consists of four staves. The top staff is in treble clef with a 12/8 time signature, containing a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes. The second staff is in treble clef with a 12/8 time signature, containing a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes. The third staff is empty. The bottom staff is in bass clef with a 12/8 time signature, containing a bass line with eighth and sixteenth notes. Below the bottom staff are the following fingering numbers: 6, 5 6, 6 6, 6, 6, 9 7 4.

Allegro

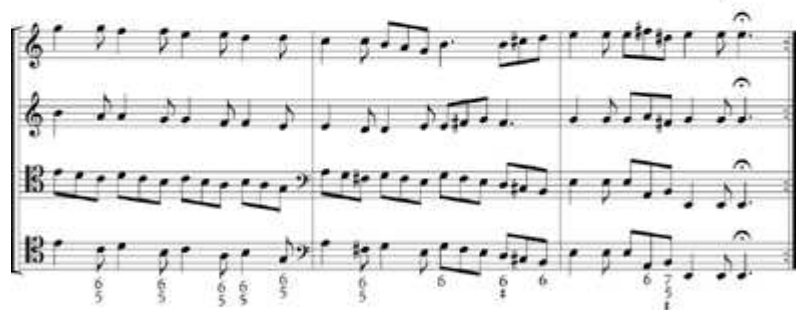
The third system of the musical score for 'Gigue Presto' consists of four staves. The top staff is in treble clef with a 12/8 time signature, containing a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes. The second staff is in treble clef with a 12/8 time signature, containing a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes. The third staff is in bass clef with a 12/8 time signature, containing a bass line with eighth and sixteenth notes. The bottom staff is in bass clef with a 12/8 time signature, containing a bass line with eighth and sixteenth notes. Below the bottom staff are the following fingering numbers: 6, 5 6, 4 3 6 6, 6, 6 6 6, 6 6 4.



System 1: Four staves of music. The top two staves are treble clef, and the bottom two are bass clef. The music features a complex rhythmic pattern with many sixteenth notes. Fingering numbers (6, 5, 6, 5, 6, 7, 6, 6, 7, 5, 7, 5, 1) are written below the bass staves.



System 2: Four staves of music. The top two staves are treble clef, and the bottom two are bass clef. The music continues with similar rhythmic complexity. Fingering numbers (6, 6, 7, 6, 5, 7, 5, 6, 6, 6, 6, 6, 7, 5, 5, 1) are written below the bass staves.



System 3: Four staves of music. The top two staves are treble clef, and the bottom two are bass clef. The music continues with similar rhythmic complexity. Fingering numbers (5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 6, 6, 6, 6, 6, 6, 7, 5, 1) are written below the bass staves.



System 4: Four staves of music. The top two staves are treble clef and contain rests. The bottom two staves are bass clef and contain musical notation. Fingering numbers (5, 6, 4, 6, 6, 5, 1, 7, 5, 1, 6, 6) are written below the bass staves.

ex. 6-1a J. A. Reincken, *Hortus musicus*, Sonata no. 1, Gigue, mm. 1–21

Gigue

The image displays a musical score for a piece titled "Gigue". The score is written for two staves, a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff, both in a 3/4 time signature. The key signature is one sharp (F#). The piece is characterized by its lively, rhythmic nature, typical of a gigue. The notation includes various note values, rests, and ornaments, particularly in the treble staff. The bass staff provides a steady accompaniment. The score is divided into several measures, with some measures containing complex rhythmic patterns and ornaments. The overall structure is a single melodic line with a supporting bass line.

ex. 6-1b J. S. Bach, the same, arranged as a keyboard sonata, mm. 1–34

From Buxtehude, Bach inherited the toccata form sampled in the previous chapter. The Toccata in F included there as Ex. 5-15 may have originally been paired with a fugue (in F minor), according to a process that Buxtehude had pioneered, whereby the “strict” and “free” sections of a toccata—that is, the rigorously imitative or “bound” *vs.* the improvisatory passages—became increasingly separate from one another and increasingly regular in their alternation, with the improvisatory passages serving as introductions to the increasingly lengthy fugal ones.

By the early eighteenth century these sectionalized toccatas had developed into pairs of discrete pieces, the free one prefacing (or serving as “prelude” to) the strict. Such a pair, although still called “Toccata” or “Toccata and fugue” when the “free” part was especially lengthy or virtuosic (as in Ex. 5-15), or “Fantasia and fugue” when the free part had strongly imitative or motif-developing tendencies, was by Bach’s time most often simply designated “Prelude

and fugue.”

Bach was the latest and greatest exponent of the prelude-and-fugue form, to which he contributed more than two dozen examples for organ, along with works in even more traditional genres, like his famous organ Passacaglia in C minor. Most of these are early works, the bulk of them composed at Weimar, where he was employed primarily as an organ virtuoso. One of Bach's most famous and mature compositions, however, was a monumental cycle of forty-eight paired preludes and fugues called *Das wohltemperirte Clavier*, in two books, the first composed in Cöthen in 1722, the second in Leipzig between 1738 and 1742.

Das wohltemperirte Clavier means “The Well-Tempered Keyboard.” Its subtitle reads “Praeludia und Fugen durch alle Tone und Semitonia,” or “Preludes and Fugues through all the Tones and Semitones.” This meant that each of the books making up Bach's famous “Forty-Eight” consisted of a prelude-and-fugue pair in all the keys of the newly elaborated complete tonal system, alternating major and minor and ascending by semitones from C major, the “purest” of the keys since it has an accidental-free signature, to B minor (thus: C, c, C#, c#, D, d, and so on). Only a keyboard tuned in something approaching “equal temperament,” with pure octaves divided into twelve equal semitones, can play equally well-in-tune throughout such a complete traversal of keys.

Equally well-in-tune actually means equally out-of-tune. Except for the octave, intervals composed of equal semitones do not correspond to those produced by natural resonance, known (after the well-known legend of their discovery) as “Pythagorean” intervals. The whole history of tuning has been one of compromise between natural resonance and practical utility. Since musical practice almost always demanded the ability to move from key to key—that is, to transpose scales so that their tonics and other harmonic functions are “keyed” to different pitches—and since the musical practice of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries suddenly demanded the ability to do this with increasing freedom and variety within single pieces, it was precisely then that the idea of equalizing the semitones decisively overcame the long-standing resistance of fastidious musicians who objected to the total loss of undeniably beautiful “pure” fourths, fifths, and thirds.

Bach's own preferred tuning was probably not yet quite equal. His practice may have accorded with that of Andreas Werckmeister (1645–1706), the author (in 1691) of the earliest treatise on equal temperament, who nevertheless declared himself willing “to have the diatonic thirds left somewhat purer than the other, less often used ones.” Bach and his contemporaries may in fact have relished the dramatizing effect of greater harmonic “impurity” in remote tonalities. And yet Bach's twofold exhaustive cycle of preludes and fugues in all the keys celebrated what he clearly regarded as an ongoing triumph of practical technology, enabling a greatly enriched tonal practice that Bach, as we already know from the Toccata in F, was very quick to exploit.

For this, too, Bach had an immediate model. Twenty years before he wrote the first volume of the “WTC,” in 1702, a south German organist and Kapellmeister named Johann Caspar Ferdinand Fischer published a collection of preludes and fugues under the title *Ariadne musica*, after the mythological princess who led the hero Theseus out of the Cretan labyrinth. The labyrinth, or maze, had long been a metaphor for wide-ranging tonal modulations, and Fischer's nineteen prelude-and-fugue pairs are cast in as many keys. (The fact that five “remote” keys are missing from his traversal probably means Fischer presupposed one of several tunings in use at the time that, while basically “well-tempered,” were farther from equal than the one used by Bach.) As early as the sixteenth century, modulatory sets of this kind, placing tonics on all the semitones, had been written as curiosities for the lute, whose frets even then were set in something like equal temperament. But Fischer was undoubtedly Bach's model, for Bach paid him tribute by quoting a few of his fugue subjects, for example the one in E major (no. 8 in Fischer, no. 9 in Bach).



ex. 6-2a J. C. F. Fischer, *Ariadne musica*, subject of the E-major Fugue



ex. 6-2b J. S. Bach, *Das wohltemperirte Clavier*, Book II, subject of the E-major Fugue

And yet just as in the case of Reincken, Bach far surpassed his model even as he kept faith with it. Not only did Bach complete the full representation of keys; he also greatly expanded the scope and the contrapuntal density of his model. And perhaps most significantly of all, he invested the music with his uniquely intense and emphatic brand of tonal harmony.

To take the full measure of the WTC in a brief description is impossible; yet something of its range of technique and its intensity of style may be gleaned by juxtaposing the very beginning and the very end of the first book: the C-major prelude and the exposition of the B-minor fugue (Ex. 6-3).

These are both famous pieces, albeit for very different reasons. The C-major prelude is a piece that every pianist encounters as a child. It is in a classic “preludizing” style that goes back to the lutenists of the sixteenth century. That style had been kept alive through the seventeenth century by the French court harpsichordists (or *clavecinistes*) who took over from their lutenist colleagues like the great Parisian virtuoso Denis Gaultier (1603–72) both the practice of composing suites of dances for their instrument, and also many “lutenistic” mannerisms such as the strumming or arpeggiated style Bach’s prelude continues to exemplify.

16

19

22

25

28

31

34

ex. 6-3a J. S. Bach, *Das wohltemperirte Clavier*, Book I, Prelude no. 1 (C major)

a4
Largo

The image shows a musical score for J.S. Bach's Fugue no. 24 in B minor, measures 1-19. The score is written for a single instrument, likely a harpsichord or clavichord, and is in the 'style brisé' (broken chord) style. The tempo is marked 'Largo' and the key signature is B minor. The score consists of six systems of music, each with a treble and bass staff. The first system includes the tempo marking 'Largo' and the fingering 'a4'. A trill (tr) is indicated in the first measure of the second system. The music features a complex, arpeggiated texture with many sixteenth and thirty-second notes.

**ex. 6-3b J. S. Bach, *Das wohltemperirte Clavier*, Book I, Fugue no. 24 (B minor),
mm. 1 – 19**

The French called it the *style brisé* or “broken [chord] style”; early written examples, like those of the *claveciniste* Louis Couperin (ca. 1626–61), preserve many aspects of what was originally an impromptu performance practice akin to the old lute *ricercar*, in which the player prefaced the main piece with a bit of preparatory strumming to capture the listeners’ attention and to establish the key. Couperin’s “unmeasured” preludes, like the one in Ex. 6-4, are especially akin to improvised lute-strumming. Their notation actually leaves the grouping and pacing of the arpeggios to the player’s discretion.

The image displays a musical score for a piece titled "Prelude sol mineur" by Louis Couperin. The score is written for a single instrument, likely a harpsichord, and is presented in a grand staff format with a treble clef on the upper staff and a bass clef on the lower staff. The music is in the key of G minor (one flat) and is characterized by its unmeasured, improvisatory style. The notation includes various rhythmic values, including minims, crotchets, and quavers, along with numerous accidentals and ornaments. The piece begins with a descending scale in the right hand, followed by a series of chords and melodic fragments. The score is divided into several systems, each containing two staves. The overall texture is dense and expressive, typical of the French lute and harpsichord repertoire.

ex. 6-4 Louis Couperin, unmeasured prelude

Thus, descending from a literally improvisatory practice, Ex. 6-3a is cast in a purely harmonic, “tuneless” idiom. (It was so tuneless as to strike later musicians as beautiful but incomplete. The French opera composer Charles Gounod [1818–93] actually wrote a melody, to the words of the antiphon *Ave Maria*, to accompany—or rather, to be accompanied by—Bach’s prelude. It is a familiar church recital piece to this day.) Even without a tune, though, Bach’s prelude has a very clearly articulated form—as well it might, since as we saw in the last chapter, it is harmony that chiefly articulates the form of “tonal” music even when melody is present.

The first four measures establish the key by preparing and resolving a cadence on the tonic. Measures 5–11 prepare and resolve a cadence on the dominant: and note that even though all the chords are “broken,” the implied contrapuntal “voice leading” is very scrupulously respected. Dissonances, chiefly passing tones and suspensions, are always resolved in the same “voice.” Thus the suspended bass note C in m. 6 resolves to B in the next measure: the

suspended B in m. 8 resolves to A in m. 9; the suspended G in the middle of the texture in m. 9 (its “voice” identifiable as the one represented by the fourth note in the arpeggio—let’s call it the alto) resolves to F# in m. 10; while the suspended C in the soprano in that same measure resolves to B in m. 11. (Ex. 6-5 shows this progression in block chords, so that the voice leading can be traced directly.)

The image shows a musical score for J.S. Bach's Prelude no. 1, measures 5-11, analyzed for voice leading. The score is presented in two staves: Treble and Bass. Above the staves, measures 5 through 11 are labeled. The Treble staff shows block chords for each measure, with some notes tied across measures. The Bass staff shows block chords for measures 6 through 11. Below the Bass staff, figured bass notation is provided for measures 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11. The figured bass notation is: 6, 4/2, 6, 4/2, 7, 7.

ex. 6-5 J. S. Bach, Prelude no. 1, mm. 5–11, analyzed for voice leading

Measures 12–19 lead the harmony back to the tonic, characteristically employing a few chromaticized harmonies as a feint, to boost the harmonic tension prior to its final resolution. That resolution turns out not to be final, however: the tonic chord sprouts a dissonant seventh, turning it into a dominant of the subdominant; and the subdominant F in the bass, having passed (mm. 21 – 24) through a fairly wrenching chromatic double neighbor (F#/A^b), settles on G, which is held as a dominant pedal for a remarkable eight measures (remarkable, that is, in a piece only 35 measures long) before making its resolution—a resolution accompanied by more harmonic feinting so that full repose is only achieved after four more measures. This apparently simple and old-fashioned composition conceals a wealth of craftsmanship, and in particular, it displays great virtuosity in the new art of manipulating tonal harmony.

That new art is really put through its paces in the B-minor fugue (Ex. 6-3b), famous for its chromatic saturation and its attendant sense of pathos—a pathos achieved by harmony alone, without any use of words. The three-measure subject is celebrated in its own right for containing within its short span every degree of the chromatic or semitonal scale, a sort of maximally intensified *passus duriusculus*, which at the same time symbolically consummates the progress of the whole cycle “through all the tones and semitones.” What gives the subject, and the whole fugue, its remarkably poignant affect is not just the high level of chromaticism, but also the way in which that chromaticism is coordinated with what, even on their first “unharmonized” appearance, are obviously dissonant leaps—known technically as *appoggiaturas* (“leaning notes”). The two leaps of a diminished seventh in the second measure are the most obviously dissonant: the jarring interval is clearly meant to be heard as an embellishment “leaning on” the minor sixth that is achieved when the first note in the slurred pair resolves by half step: C-natural to B, D to C#. But in fact, as the ensuing counterpoint reveals, *every* first note of a slurred pair is (or can be treated as) a dissonant appoggiatura.

A thorough analysis of mm. 9–15, encompassing the entries of the third (bass) and fourth (soprano) voices, will reveal an astonishing level of dissonance on the strong beats, where the appoggiaturas fall. The bass G in m. 9 is harmonized with a tritone; the B on the next beat clashes with the C# above; the E on the downbeat makes the same clash against the F# above; the C that follows is harmonized with a tritone; the F# that comes next, with a fourth and a second; and the D on the fourth beat of m. 10 creates a seventh against the suspended C#. Most of these dissonances are created not by suspensions but by direct leaps—the strongest kind of dissonance one can have in tonal music. Turning now to the soprano entrance in m. 13, we find a tritone and a diminished seventh against the D on the third beat; a leapt-to seventh on the fourth; a simultaneous clash of tritone, seventh, and fourth on the ensuing downbeat; a tritone against the sustained B on the second beat; another leapt-to seventh on the third beat

and so it goes.

It will come as no surprise to learn that these slurred descending pairs with dissonant beginnings were known as *Seufzer*—“sighs” or “groans”—and that they had originated as a kind of word-painting or madrigalism. The transfer of vivid illustrative effects, even onomatopoeias, into “abstract” musical forms shows that those forms, at least as handled by Bach, were not abstract at all, but fraught with a maximum of emotional baggage. What is most remarkable is the way Bach consistently contrives to let the illustrative idea that bears the “affective” significance serve simultaneously as the motive from which the musical stuff is spun out.

Structure and signification, “form” and “content,” are thus indissolubly wedded, made virtually synonymous. That was the expressive ideal at the very root of the “radical humanism” that gave rise to what Monteverdi (unbeknown to Bach) had called the *seconda prattica* a hundred years before. Monteverdi could only envisage its realization in the context of vocal music (where “the text will be the master of the music”). He never dreamed that such an art could flourish in textless instrumental music. That was what Bach, building on a century of musical changes, would achieve within an outwardly old-fashioned, even backward-looking career.

Clearly, Bach’s art had a Janus face. Formally and texturally it looked back to what were even then archaic practices. In terms of harmony and tonally articulated form, however, it was at the cutting edge. That cutting edge still pierces the consciousness of listeners today and calls forth an intense response, while the music of every other Lutheran cantor of the time has perished from the actual repertory.

The other traditional genre that Bach inherited directly from his Lutheran organist forebears, and from Buxtehude most immediately, was the chorale setting. This was a protean genre. It could assume many forms, anywhere from a colossal set of improvised or composed variations (the type with which Bach enraptured Reincken and called forth his blessing) to a minuscule *Choralvorspiel* or “chorale prelude,” a single-verse setting with which the organist might cue the congregation to sing, or provide an accompaniment to silent meditation. The chorale melody in such a piece might be treated strictly as a *cantus firmus*, or else melodically embellished, or else played off against a *ritornello* or a ground bass, or else elaborated “motet-style” into points of fugal imitation based on its constituent phrases.

Toward the end of his Weimar period, ever the encyclopedist and the synthesizer, Bach set about collecting his chorale preludes into a liturgical cycle that would cover the whole year’s services. He had only inscribed forty-six items out of a projected 164 in this manuscript, called the *Orgelbüchlein* (“Little organ book”), when he was called away to Cöthen. But in their variety, the ones entered fully justify Bach’s claim on the manuscript’s title page, that in his little book “a beginner at the organ is given instruction in developing a chorale in many diverse ways.” We can compare Buxtehude and Bach directly, and in a manner that will confirm our previous comparisons, by putting side by side their chorale preludes—Bach’s from the *Orgelbüchlein*—on *Durch Adams Fall ist ganz verderbt* (“Through Adam’s fall we are condemned,” Ex. 6-6).

The first system of music features three staves. The top staff is in treble clef with a common time signature (C). It contains four measures of music, starting with a whole rest followed by a half note G4, then a half note A4, and finally a quarter note G4 beamed with an eighth note F4. The middle staff is in bass clef with a common time signature. It begins with a whole rest, followed by a half note chord of G4 and B4, then a half note chord of G4 and B4 with a slur over a quarter note G4 and a quarter note F4. The bottom staff is in bass clef with a common time signature and contains four measures of music: a whole rest, a half note G4, a whole rest, and a half note G4.

The second system of music features three staves. The top staff is in treble clef with a common time signature and contains four measures of music: a whole rest, a whole rest, a whole rest, and a quarter note G4. The middle staff is in bass clef with a common time signature and contains four measures of music: a half note chord of G4 and B4, a half note chord of G4 and B4 with a slur over a quarter note G4 and a quarter note F4, a half note chord of G4 and B4 with a slur over a quarter note G4 and a quarter note F4, and a half note chord of G4 and B4 with a slur over a quarter note G4 and a quarter note F4. The bottom staff is in bass clef with a common time signature and contains four measures of music: a whole rest, a whole rest, a whole rest, and a whole rest.

First system of musical notation for a piano piece. It consists of three staves: a treble clef staff at the top, a bass clef staff in the middle, and a bass clef staff at the bottom. The top staff contains a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes. The middle staff contains a bass line with eighth and sixteenth notes. The bottom staff is mostly empty, with a few notes in the first measure.

Second system of musical notation. The top staff has a whole rest. The middle staff has a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes. The bottom staff has a bass line with eighth and sixteenth notes.

Third system of musical notation. The top staff has a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes. The middle staff has a bass line with eighth and sixteenth notes. The bottom staff has a bass line with eighth and sixteenth notes.

Fourth system of musical notation. The top staff has a whole rest. The middle staff has a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes. The bottom staff has a bass line with eighth and sixteenth notes.

Fifth system of musical notation. The top staff has a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes. The middle staff has a bass line with eighth and sixteenth notes. The bottom staff has a bass line with eighth and sixteenth notes.

ex. 6-6a Dietrich Buxtehude, *Durch Adams Fall*, mm. 1–23

The first system of the musical score for 'Durch Adams Fall' by J.S. Bach. It consists of three staves: a treble clef staff with a C-clef, a bass clef staff with an F-clef, and a lower bass clef staff. The music is in 3/4 time and features a complex texture with many sixteenth and thirty-second notes.

The second system of the musical score, continuing the complex texture from the first system. It includes first and second endings marked '1.' and '2.' above the treble staff.

The third system of the musical score, featuring the second ending and further intricate keyboard textures.

The fourth system of the musical score, showing the continuation of the piece's rhythmic and melodic patterns.

The fifth system of the musical score, maintaining the dense polyphonic texture.

The sixth system of the musical score, the final system of this section, ending with a fermata on the treble staff.

The final system of the musical score, consisting of three staves. The treble staff has a fermata over a chord, the middle bass staff has a melodic line, and the lower bass staff has a simple accompaniment. The piece concludes with a final cadence.

ex. 6-6b J. S. Bach, *Durch Adams Fall* (*Orgelbüchlein*, no. 38)

Although the first line makes reference to what for Christians was the greatest catastrophe in human history, the

real subject of the chorale's text is God's mercy by which man may be redeemed from Adam's original sin through faith in Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, it is the first line that sets the tone for the setting, since the first verse is the one directly introduced by the prelude. Both Buxtehude's prelude and Bach's, therefore, are tinged with grief. The chorale melody, treated plain by Bach, with some embellishment by Buxtehude, is surrounded by affective counterpoints.

In Buxtehude's case the affect is created by chromatically ascending and descending lines that enter after a curious suppression of the bass. In Bach's setting, the most striking aspect is surely the pedal part. This in itself is no surprise: spotlighting the pedal part was one of Bach's special predilections, as we already know from the Toccata in F (Ex. 5-15), and fancy footwork was one of his specialties as an organ virtuoso. On the title page of the *Orgelbüchlein*, which he intended to publish on completion, Bach included a little sales pitch, promising that the purchaser will "acquire facility in the study of the pedal, since in the chorales contained herein, the pedal is treated as wholly *obbligato*," that is, as an independent voice.

What is a powerful surprise, and further evidence of Bach's unique imaginative boldness, is the specific form the obbligato pedal part takes in this chorale setting: almost nothing but dissonant drops of a seventh—Adam's fall made audible! And not just the fall, but also the attendant pain and suffering are depicted (and in a way evoked), since so many of those sevenths are diminished. A rank madrigalism, the fall, is given emotional force through sheer harmonic audacity and is then made the primary unifying motive of the composition. Again the union of illustration and construction, symbolic image and feeling, "form" and "content," is complete. And if, as seems likely, Buxtehude meant the three falling fifths that accompany the first phrase of the chorale in the bass to symbolize the fall, we have another case of Bach's propensity to emulate—to adopt a model and then surpass it to an outlandish degree, amounting to a virtual difference in kind.

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Johann Jacob Froberger

Dance: Late Renaissance and Baroque

ROOTS (IMPORTED)

Chapter: CHAPTER 6 Class of 1685 (I)

Source: MUSIC IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

The same attitude Bach displayed in intensifying and transforming the traditional techniques of his trade characterized his relationship to all the styles of his time. Despite the seemingly cloistered insularity of his career, he nevertheless mastered, and by his lights transcended, the full range of contemporary musical idioms. In part this was simply a matter of being German. At a time when French and Italian musicians were mutually suspicious and much concerned with resisting each other's influence, German musicians tended to define themselves as universal synthesists, able (in the words of Johann Joachim Quantz, a colleague of C. P. E. Bach's at the Prussian court) "to select with due discrimination from the musical tastes of various peoples what is best in each," thereby producing "a mixed taste which, without overstepping the bounds of modesty, may very well be called the German taste."² Bach became its ultimate, most universal, exponent.

But he had many predecessors. We know how eagerly Heinrich Schütz, born a hundred years before Bach, had imported the Italian styles of his day to Germany. A younger contemporary of Schütz, the sometime Viennese court organist Johann Jacob Froberger (1616–67), a native of Stuttgart in southern Germany, traveled the length and breadth of Europe, soaking up influences everywhere. After a period (approximately 1637 to 1640) spent studying with Frescobaldi in Rome, Froberger visited Brussels (then in the Spanish Netherlands), Paris, England, and Saxony. He died in the service of a French-speaking German court in the Rhineland, the westernmost part of Germany.

The first whole book of pieces by Froberger to be (posthumously) published was eminently Frescobaldian: *Diverse curiose partite, di toccate, canzone, ricercate etc.* ("Assorted off-beat toccatas, canzonas, ricercars and so on"). Four years later, there followed a book containing *Dix suites de clavessin* ("Ten suites for harpsichord"), in a style that comported perfectly with the language of the title page. This book of suites would be by far Froberger's most influential publication. By century's end, the French style had become a veritable German fetish, the object of intense envy and adaptation. Envy played an important role because it was envy of the opulent French court on the part of the many petty German princelings that led to the wholesale adoption of French manners by the German aristocracy. French actually became the court language of Germany, and French dancing became an obligatory social grace at the many mini-Versailleses that dotted the German landscape.

With dancing, of course, came music. Demand for French (or French-style) ballroom music, and for instruction in composing and playing it, became so great that by the end of the seventeenth century a number of German musicians, sensing a ready market, had set themselves up in business as professional Gallicizers. One of these was Georg Muffat (1653–1704), an organist at the episcopal court at Passau, who had played violin as a youth under Lully in Paris. In 1695 he published a set of dance suites in the Lullian mold, together with a treatise on how to play them in the correct Lullian "ballet style." His rules, especially those concerning unwritten conventions of rhythm and bowing, have been a goldmine to today's "historical" performers, who need to overcome a temporal distance from the music comparable to the geographical distance Muffat's original readers confronted.

Another Gallicizer was J. C. F. Fischer, with whose *Ariadne* we are already acquainted. His Opus 1 was a book of dance suites for orchestra called *Le journal de printems* ("Spring's Diary," 1695), in which he prefaced the dances, originally composed for the ballroom of the Margrave Ludwig of Baden, with Lully-style overtures. Although the components were all French, this type of orchestral "overture suite" was in fact a German invention, pioneered by Johann Sigismund Kusser (or "Cousser," *à la française*) a sort of Froberger of the violin who studied in Paris with Lully and then plied his trade all over Europe, ending up in Dublin, where he died in 1727. Orchestral suites of this kind, actually called *ouvertures* after their opening items, remained a German specialty. Telemann, cited by the

Guinness Book of World Records as the most prolific composer of all time, composed around 150 of them.

Fischer's op. 2, titled *Musicalisches Blumen-Büschlein* ("A little musical flower bush," 1696), was a book of harpsichord suites on the Froberger model. Between the two of them, Froberger's publication and Fischer's managed to establish a standard suite format that provided the model for all their German or German-born successors. Froberger's contribution was the truly fundamental one: it was he who adopted a specific sequence of four dances as essential nucleus in all his suites, setting a precedent that governed the composition of keyboard suites from then on. Fischer prefaced his suites with preludes, some patterned on the *style brisé*, others on the toccata. This, too, became an important precedent, albeit not quite as universally observed by later composers. (Bach, for example, composed suites both with and without preludes, but always included Froberger's core dances.)

It is worth emphasizing that Froberger's core dances had, by the time he adapted them, pretty much gone out of actual ballroom use. They had been sublimated into elevated courtly listening-music by the master instrumentalists of France, which meant slowing them down and cramming them full of interesting musical detail that would have been lost on dancers. The typical French instrumental manuscript or publication of the day, whether for lute, for harpsichord, or for viol, generally consisted of several vast compendia of idealized dance pieces in a given key, each basic type being multiply represented. The French composers, in other words, did not write actual ready-made suites, but provided the materials from which players could select a sequence (that is, a *suite*) for performance. It was Froberger and his German progeny who began, as it were, "preselecting" the components, thus casting their suites as actual multimovement compositions like sonatas.

The four favored dances, chosen for their contrasting tempos and meters (and, consequently, their contrasting moods), were these:

- 1. *Allemande*. This dance had a checkered history. As its name suggests, it originated in Germany, but by the time German composers borrowed it back from the French it had changed utterly. In its original form it was a quick dance in duple meter. The first keyboard examples are by the English virginalists, who called it the *alman*, and Frescobaldi, who called it the *bal tedesco* or *balletto*. It was Gaultier and his *claveciniste* contemporary Jacques Champion de Chambonnières (1602–72) who slowed it down into a stately instrumental solo in a broad four beats per bar and a richly detailed texture. It was this elegantly dignified *allemande*, never before heard in Germany, that Froberger borrowed back and ensconced permanently in the opening slot of his standard suite.
- 2. *Courante*. In its older form, more often called (in Italian) *corrente*, this was a lively mock-courtship dance, notated in or even meter. (Examples can be found in any Corelli *sonata da camera*; see Ex. 5-1.) The idealized French type borrowed by Froberger was just the opposite: the gravest of all triple-time suite pieces, notated in with many lilting hemiola effects in which patterns cut across the pulse.
- 3. *Sarabande*. Of all the suite dances, this one underwent the most radical change in the process of sublimation. It originated in the New World and was brought back to Europe, as the *zarabanda*, from Mexico. In its original form it was a breakneck, sexy affair, accompanied by castanets. Like the passacaglia or chaconne, it consisted originally of a chordal ostinato and is first found notated in Spanish guitar tablatures. Banned from the Spanish ballroom by decree for its alleged obscenity, it was idealized in a deliberately denatured form, becoming (like the chaconne) a majestic triple-metered dance for the ballet stage, often compared to a slow minuet. As borrowed by Froberger, it usually had an accented second beat, rhythmically expressed by a lengthened (doubled or dotted) note value.
- 4. *Gigue*. Imported to Europe from England and Ireland, the jig was (typically) danced faster in Italy (as the *giga*), in more leisurely fashion by the more self-conscious bluebloods of the French court and their German mimics. In its idealized form, the gigue usually began with a point of imitation, which (as we have already observed in Reincken and Bach) was often inverted in the second strain.

A "binary" or double-strain structure (AABB), supported by a there-and-back harmonic plan, was a universal feature of suite dances, particularly as adopted by Germans. (In France there was an alternative: the so-called *pièce en rondeau*, in which multiple strains alternated with a refrain.) In the hands of Bach and his contemporaries, the binary dance became another important site for developing the kind of tonally articulated form that conditioned new habits of listening and formed the bedrock of the standard performing repertory.

Notes:

(2) Johann Joachim Quantz, *On Playing the Flute*, trans. Edward R. Reilly (New York: Schirmer, 1975), p. 341.

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Johann Sebastian Bach

Partita

BACH'S SUITES

Chapter: CHAPTER 6 Class of 1685 (I)

Source: MUSIC IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES

Author(s): Richard Taruskin



fig. 6-7 Title page of Anna Magdalena Bach's music book (*Clavier-Büchlein*), 1722.

As we know, Bach never went to France. Instead, France came to him through the musical publications that circulated widely in the Gallicized musical environment that was Germany. Bach made his most thorough assimilation of the French style when he was professionally required to do so. That was in 1717, when he left Weimar for the position of Kapellmeister in Cöthen. This was an entirely secular position, the only such position Bach ever occupied and an unusual one for any "Bach." His new employer, Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Cöthen, was a passionate musical amateur, who esteemed Bach highly and related to him practically on terms of friendship. (He even stood godfather to one of Bach's children.) Leopold not only consumed music avidly but played it himself (on violin, bass viol or viola da gamba, and harpsichord) and had even studied composition for a while in Rome with Johann David Heinichen (1683–1729), a notable German musician of the day. He maintained a court orchestra of eighteen instrumentalists, including some very distinguished ones. And he was a Calvinist, which meant he had no use for elaborate composed church music or fancy organ playing. So Bach had no call to compose or play in church and could

devote all his time to satisfying his patron's demands for musical entertainments.

Thus for six years Bach wrote mainly instrumental music. The first book of the WTC dates from the Cöthen period, as we know, but that was done on the side. The kind of entertainments demanded of Bach as part of his official duties would have taken the form of sonatas, concertos, and above all, suites. Bach turned out several dozen of the latter, ranging from orchestral *ouvertures* through various sets for keyboard, to suites for unaccompanied violin and even cello, the latter unprecedented as far as we know. He even wrote a couple of suites for the practically obsolete lute, the historical progenitor of the idealized suite-for-listening, which still had a few devotees in Germany.

Most of Bach's keyboard suites are grouped in three sets, each containing six of them. The earliest is a set of six large suites with elaborate preludes and highly embellished sarabandes, probably composed in Weimar around 1715. They were published posthumously as "English Suites," and have been called that ever since, although no one really knows why. The set published (also posthumously) as "French Suites" are close to the Froberger model. The four dances standardized by Froberger provide the core, with a smaller group of faster and lighter "modern" dances interpolated between the sarabande and the gigue. Of the six French Suites, five are found in one of the music books of Anna Magdalena Bach, the composer's second wife. They were probably composed for the private enjoyment of Bach's family and the instruction of his children.

The final group of six, though written at Cöthen, were assembled, engraved, and published by Bach himself at Leipzig in 1731, as the first volume of an omnibus keyboard collection unassumingly titled *Clavier-Übung* ("Keyboard practice"). Bach borrowed the name from his predecessor as Leipzig cantor, Johann Kuhnau, who published a set of keyboard suites under that title in 1689. Bach also followed Kuhnau in calling the suites contained therein by the old-fashioned (and somewhat misleading) title "partitas." When we last encountered it (chapter 2), the word "partita" referred to a set of variations, in Lutheran countries often based on chorale melodies. Bach's fame has firmly implanted his unusual usage in the common vocabulary of music. When musicians use the word "partita" now, it almost always means a dance suite.

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J.S. Bach: Music for harpsichord, lute etc.

Style galant

Allemande

Courante

Sarabande

Gavotte

Loure

A CLOSE-UP

Chapter: CHAPTER 6 Class of 1685 (I)

Source: MUSIC IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

The nucleus of Bach's fifth French Suite, in G major, consists of the Frobergerian core of allemande, courante, sarabande, and gigue, augmented by a trio of slighter dances (a gavotte, a bourée, and a loure) interpolated before the gigue. Bach himself used the term *Galanterien* (from the French *galanteries*) on the title page of the *Clavier-Übung* to classify these interpolated dances and distinguish them from the core, describing his suites (or partitas) as consisting of "Präludien, Allemanden, Couranten, Sarabanden, Gigue, Menuetten, und anderen Galanterien." Note that the obligatory or core dances are listed (after the preludes) in order, while the variable category of "minuets and other *galanteries*" is mentioned casually, out of order, as if an afterthought. This contrast in manner is very telling.

Even though the word *galanterie* can be translated as a "trifle," it denotes a very important esthetic category. It is derived from what the French called the *style galant*, which stemmed in turn from the old French verb *galer*, which meant "to amuse" in a tasteful, courtly sort of way, with refined wit, elegant manners, and easy grace. It was a quality of art—and life—far removed from the stern world of the traditional Lutheran church, and Bach never fully reconciled the difference between the sources that fed his creative stream.

First system of a musical score in G major and 3/4 time. The treble clef staff features a melodic line with a trill on the first measure and a slur over the second measure. The bass clef staff provides a harmonic accompaniment with a steady eighth-note pattern.

Second system of the musical score. The treble clef staff continues the melodic line with a slur over the second measure. The bass clef staff maintains the accompaniment with a trill on the first measure.

Third system of the musical score. The treble clef staff shows a melodic line with a slur over the second measure. The bass clef staff continues the accompaniment with a trill on the first measure.

Fourth system of the musical score. The treble clef staff features a melodic line with a slur over the second measure. The bass clef staff provides a harmonic accompaniment with a trill on the first measure.

ex. 6-7a J. S. Bach, French Suite no. 5 in G major, Allemande

To put Bach's allemande (Ex. 6-7a) alongside one written sixty or seventy years earlier by Froberger (Ex. 6-7b) is to marvel at the sheer persistence of the French courtly style in Germany. The old *style brisé*, in which the harpsichord aped the elegant strumming of a lute, informs both pieces equally, although Froberger learned it directly from the lutenists (one of his best known pieces being a *tombeau*, or "tombstone," an especially grave allemande or pavane composed *in memoriam*, for the Parisian lutenist Blancrocher, a friend), while Bach would have learned it from Froberger, from Kuhnau, and from their followers.

ex. 6-7b Johann Jakob Froberger, Suite in E minor, Allemande

The difference between the pieces is the usual difference between Bach and his predecessors or contemporaries. Although not much longer than Froberger's (twenty-four measures as against twenty), Bach's makes a far more distinctive and developed impression thanks to two characteristic features, one melodic and the other harmonic. The opening motive of Bach's allemande, a three-beat ascent of a third (with pickups and a distinguishing trill), is treated *thematically*—that is, as a form-definer—in a way that was unknown to Froberger.

While Froberger had at his disposal characteristic ways of articulating the melodic shape of his composition—for example, the three-note pickup that begins each half—Bach uses the opening motive to lend the two halves of his allemande a sense of thematic parallelism, echoing on the melodic plane the overall symmetry of design that is chiefly articulated by the harmony. Coordination of the harmonic and melodic spheres is additionally confirmed by the use of the opening motive, replete with defining trill, to point the cadences in m. 4 (which establishes the tonic) and in m. 5 (which launches the movement to the dominant). For an even more dramatic illustration of how conscious and deliberate Bach's motivic writing could be, compare a passage from one of his concertos (for two harpsichords in C major, probably composed later in Leipzig), in which the same opening figure from the allemande is dramatically proclaimed as a “headmotive” that introduces the main ritornello and is also developed antiphonally as an episode (Ex. 6-7c and d).

As to harmony, both allemandes follow the same there-and-back pendular motion between tonic and dominant that defines the “binary” form of a dance, but Bach’s ranges wider and is at the same time more sharply focused. Each half of Froberger’s dance follows a single motion between harmonic centers with no major stops along the way. Each half of Bach’s, by contrast, is divided into two distinct phrases, keenly marked by cadences. The first phrase, mm. 1–4, begins and ends with the tonic, thus reinforcing it by closure. The balancing phrase, mm. 5–12, establishes the dominant as cadential goal. (Actually, the dominant is reached at m. 8, so that the phrase has two equal components, one that “moves” and the other that “re-arrives” after some interesting chromatic digressions.)

mm. 1 - 4

ex. 6-7c J. S. Bach, Concerto in C for Two Harpsichords, BWV 1061, I, mm. 1–4

mm. 28 - 32

ex. 6-7d J. S. Bach, Concerto in C for Two Harpsichords, BWV 1061, I, mm. 28–32

The second half of Bach’s allemande is divided more equally than the first. Its first phrase, mm. 13–18, moves from the dominant not straight back to the tonic but to a “secondary function” (that is, a chord with opposite quality from the tonic), in this case E minor, the submediant. The concluding phrase finally zeroes back on the tonic, harking back to the “interesting chromatic digressions” from the first half to signal its impending arrival.

That shape will henceforth serve as paradigm for a fully “tonal” binary form. The new elements include the care with which the tonic is established (almost the way a ritornello might establish it in a concerto movement), and the compensating feint in the direction of some “far out point” (henceforth FOP) in the second half of the piece to redirect the harmonic motion home with renewed force. Once again Bach is out in front of his contemporaries in harnessing the power of tonality to steer the course of a composition through a sort of journey, and to take the measure of its distance, at all points, from “home.”

The other movements in the French Suite all confirm this basic pattern of harmonic motion, in which the simple “binary” there-and-back is amplified and extended by means of an initial closure on the tonic to emphasize departure, and an excursion to a FOP on the way back, thus: Here-there-FOP-back. In the Italian-style courante or corrente (Ex. 6-8a), the cadential points are distributed with perfect regularity, as follows: m. 8 (I), m. 16 (V), m. 24 (vi), m. 32 (I). Compare the tonally much more elusive French-style courante from the third French Suite in B minor (Ex. 6-8b), in which the cadence points are quite unpredictably and asymmetrically distributed among its 28 spacious measures: m. 5 (i), m. 12 (V), m. 19 (iv), m. 28 (i).

ex. 6-8a J. S. Bach, French Suite no. 5 in G major, Courante

Courante

ossia

ex. 6-8b J. S. Bach, French Suite no. 3 in B minor, Courante

Note, too, how every pre-cadential measure in Ex. 6-8b (i.e., mm. 4, 11, 18, and 27) foreshadows the cadence by speeding up the harmonic rhythm (that is, the rate of harmony-change) and by regrouping the measure's six quarter notes by pairs rather than by threes, producing a so-called "hemiola" pattern of three beats in the normal time of two. (The pre-cadential bars are not the only ones that are felt in "3" rather than "2": the surest signal for hemiola grouping is the presence of a dotted quarter note, usually trilled, on the fifth beat.) By comparison with the stately old-style French courante (the only kind Froberger knew), the Italianate type—by virtue of its rhythmic evenness, its regular cadences, and its uncomplicated, predominantly two-voiced texture—is practically a *galanterie*.

The image displays a musical score for a piece in 3/4 time, consisting of four systems of music. Each system is written for two staves: a treble staff and a bass staff. The key signature is one sharp (F#). The first system begins at measure 1. The second system begins at measure 5. The third system begins at measure 10. The fourth system begins at measure 14. The score includes various rhythmic patterns, such as hemiola groupings, and concludes with a double bar line and repeat signs.

ex. 6-9 J. S. Bach, French Suite no. 5 in G major, Sarabande

In the sarabande (Ex. 6-9), the cadence points again evenly divide the first half. In contrast, the second half is elaborately subdivided into sections cadencing on two FOPs (ii in m. 20 and vi in m. 24), and the trip back to the tonic is subarticulated with stops on the subdominant (m. 28) and the dominant (m. 36) before finally touching down at the end (m. 40). The result is a colorfully lengthened, but also strengthened, harmonic structure.

While of course slighter, the *galanteries* (Ex. 6-10a-c) observe similar tonal proportions. The *gavotte* (Ex. 6-10a), a buoyant dance with beats on the half note and a characteristic two-quarter pickup, has cadences on mm. 4 (I), 8 (V), 16 (vi), and 24 (I). Notice that the tendency to expand the second half, already apparent in the sarabande, is maintained here as well by doubling the phrase lengths, though without the addition of any supplementary cadence points. The *bourrée* (Ex. 6-10b), a rambunctious stylized peasant dance in two quick beats per bar, has its cadences more irregularly placed: mm. 4 (I), 10 (V), 18 (vi), 30 (I). That irregularity is part of its *galant* or witty charm: each phrase is longer than the last, and the listener is kept guessing how much longer.

A musical score for a Gavotte in G major, French Suite no. 5 by J.S. Bach. The score is written for piano and consists of five systems of two staves each (treble and bass clef). The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is common time (C). The music features a mix of chords and moving lines in both hands, with some measures containing rests. The piece concludes with a double bar line and repeat dots.

ex. 6-10a J. S. Bach, French Suite no. 5 in G major, Gavotte

A musical score for a Gavotte in G major, French Suite no. 5 by J.S. Bach. The score is written for piano and consists of three systems of two staves each (treble and bass clef). The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is common time (C). The music features a mix of chords and moving lines in both hands, with some measures containing rests. The piece concludes with a double bar line and repeat dots.

The image displays a musical score for a Bourée by J.S. Bach, part of the French Suite no. 5 in G major. The score is presented in four systems, each consisting of a treble and bass clef staff. The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 3/4. The music features a mix of eighth and sixteenth notes, with some measures containing triplets. The piece concludes with a repeat sign and a final cadence.

ex. 6-10b J. S. Bach, French Suite no. 5 in G major, Bourée

ex. 6-10c J. S. Bach, French Suite no. 5 in G major, Loure

The *loure* (Ex. 6-10c), one of the rarer dances, might be described as a heavy (*lourd*) or rustic gigue in doubled note values. (In the sixteenth century the word *loure* was used for a certain kind of bagpipe, but whether that is the source of the dance's name is unclear.) Its meter and note values resemble those of the “true” French courante (as in Ex. 6-8b), but its rhythms—particularly the pattern (J. J. J.) already familiar from the Scarlattian siciliano—are gigue-like. Altogether unlike those of the courante in Ex. 6-8b, the cadences of Bach's *loure* are distributed with perfect regularity (mm. 4, 8, 12, 16). The supertonic (ii), somewhat unusually, is used in place of the submediant (vi) as FOP.

Finally, the gigue (Ex. 6-11): with its 56-bar length (distributed 24 + 32) and its fugal expositions in three real parts, it is the most elaborate dance of all. Tracking cadences here is complicated by the behavior of the fugal writing

which has its own pendular rhythm. The first fugal exposition makes its final tonic cadence on the third beat of m. 9, and the dominant is reached by the third beat of m. 14, when the bass enters with the subject. Final confirmation of arrival on V comes, after a lengthy episode, in m. 24. The second half begins, just as Bach's *gigue* after Reincken (Ex. 6-1b) had begun, with an inversion. As befits a dance (if not a fugue), this inverted exposition ends, somewhat indefinitely, on a FOP (either *vi* in m. 37 or *ii* in m. 38). The bass then enters with the subject on the dominant of *vi*, to start steering the course through a slow circle of fifths toward home.

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Style galant

Gigue

François Couperin

“AGREMENS” AND “DOUBLES”

Chapter: CHAPTER 6 Class of 1685 (I)

Source: MUSIC IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

To conclude this little study of the French Suite No. 5, two more comparisons are in order, one “internal,” and the other “external.” The internal distinction, of course, is that between the styles of the traditional “obligatory” dances and the *galanteries*. Putting the allemande next to the gavotte shows how radically they differ. The textural and harmonic richness of the allemande’s *style brisé* contrasts with the virtual homophony of the gavotte; the subtle spun-out phrases of the one with the square-cut strains of the other; the placid, equable rhythms of the former with the highly contrasted, vivacious rhythms of the latter.

These musical (“technical”) differences are symptomatic of a fundamental difference in taste, one that would eventually mark the eighteenth century as a kind of esthetic battleground. With Bach, the *galant*, while certainly within his range, is nevertheless the exceptional style—the sauce rather than the meat. With most of his contemporaries, the balance had rather decisively shifted to the opposite.

The image displays a page of musical notation, likely a score for a keyboard instrument. It consists of seven systems, each with a treble clef staff on top and a bass clef staff on the bottom. The music is written in a style characteristic of the 17th and 18th centuries, featuring complex rhythmic patterns and melodic lines. The notation includes various note values, rests, and ornaments. The piece begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The time signature is 16/8. The notation is dense and intricate, with many sixteenth and thirty-second notes. The piece concludes with a double bar line and a repeat sign.

ex. 6-11 J. S. Bach, French Suite no. 5 in G major, Gigue

Here is where the external comparison comes in. Consider another gigue to set beside Bach's: the one that opens the fourteenth *ordre*, or “set,” of harpsichord pieces (published in 1722) by Bach's greatest keyboard-playing contemporary, François Couperin (1668–1733), royal organist and chief *musicien de chambre* to Louis XIV (Ex. 6-12). Couperin's is a “set” rather than a suite because, following traditional French practice, the pieces in it, while related by key, are too numerous to be played or heard in one sitting and are not placed in performance order. One fashioned one's own suite from such a set *ad libitum*.



fig. 6-8 François Couperin (ex collection André Meyer).

Couperin’s *gigue* (Ex. 6-12a) is not identified as such by title. It is, rather, identifiable by its rocking meter. That is the normal *gigue* meter; Bach’s is a diminution, betokening a faster tempo than usual. That tempo, since it is conventional, can be conveyed by the notation alone, without any ancillary explanation. And indeed, none of the dances in Bach’s suite carry any verbal indications as to their tempo. Such indications were not needed. The name of the dance, the meter, and the note values conveyed all the essential information.

But the situation with Couperin’s *gigue*, one of his most famous pieces (and rightly so), is just the opposite. It is not called “*gigue*,” but *Le Rossignol en amour*, “The Nightingale in Love”! It is not really a dance at all, but a “character piece” or (to use Couperin’s own word) a sort of “portrait” in tones, cast in a conventional form inherited from dance music. The subject portrayed is ostensibly a bird, and the decorative surface of the music teems with embellishments that seem delightfully to imitate the bird’s singing. But since (according to the title) the bird in question is incongruously experiencing a human emotion, the musical imitation is simultaneously to be “read” as a metaphor—a portrait not just of the bird but of the emotion, too, in all its tenderness, its languorousness, its “sweet sorrow.”

Since the conventional tempo of a *gigue* contradicts tenderness or languor, Couperin had to countermand it with a very detailed verbal indication, directing the performer to play “slowly, and very flexibly, although basically in time.”

At the stipulated tempo there is room for a great wealth of embellishment, all indicated with little shorthand signs that Bach also used, and that are (mostly) still familiar to piano students today. The first sign in order of appearance, which Couperin called the *pincée* (a “pinched note”) and which we now call a mordant, is a rapid alternation of the written note with its lower neighbor on the scale. The second, which Couperin called *tremblement* (“trembling”) and we now call a short trill (or, sometimes, a shake), is a rapid and repeated alternation of the written note with its upper neighbor.

Lentement, et tres tendrement, quoy que mesuré

accens plaintifs

augmentes par gradations imperceptibles

ex. 6-12a François Couperin, *Le Rossignol en amour* (14th Ordre, no. 1), beginning

Such conventionalized, localized ornaments, called “graces” in English at the time, and *agrémens* in French, were learned “orally”—by listening to one’s teacher and imitating, the way instrumental technique has always been (and will always be) imparted. There were tables of reference, of course, and many composers compiled them. Couperin’s (published as an insert to his first book of harpsichord pieces in 1713) is shown in Fig. 6-9. For an even more intense or less conventionalized expression, one resorted to specifically composed embellishments.

Explication des Agrémens, et des Signes.

C'est la valeur des Notes qui doit déterminer la durée des pincés, des portes de Voix; et des Tremblemens. On doit entendre par le mot de durée le plus ou le moins de Battemens, ou Vibrations.

Signes pour les Renvois des Reprises.

Signes pour les renvois des Notes finales.

Liaisons.

Signes pour marquer les Notes qui doivent être liées, et coulées.

fig. 6-9 “Explication des Agrémens, et des Signes,” from Couperin’s first book of *Pièces de clavecin* (Paris, 1713).

That is what Couperin does in his coda or *petite reprise*, where he notes that the speed of the written-out trill is to be “increased by imperceptible degrees” for an especially spontaneous (or especially ornithological) burst of feeling. And then he follows the whole piece with a “fancy version” or *double* (Ex. 6-12b), in which the surface becomes a real welter of notes, and where it becomes the supreme mark of skillful performance to keep the lineaments of the original melody in the foreground. (Perhaps that is why Couperin recommends in a footnote that the piece be played as a flute solo, for the flutist can use flexible dynamic shading and a true legato, while a harpsichordist must “fake” both.) *Agrémens* are still used plentifully in a *double*, but they are supplemented with turns and runs that have no conventional shorthand notation. Bach’s most notable *doubles* are those he wrote for the sarabandes in his “English” suites (although he called them, a little incorrectly, “agrémens”).

Miniatures that display the kind of exquisitely embellished, decorative veneer Couperin knew so well how to apply are often called *rococo*, a kind of “portmanteau word” formed by folding together two French words: *rocaille* and *coquille*, the “rock-” or “grotto-work” and “shell-work” featured in expensively textured architectural surfaces of the period. Were the decorative surface stripped away from Couperin’s *pièce*, the simplest of shapes would remain: cadences come every four bars (the last one delayed by two bars of “plaintive iterations”), describing a bare-bones

tonal trajectory of I – V/V–I. Nor is the emotion expressed one of great vehemence or intensity. Rococo art expressed the same sort of aristocratic, “public” sentiments (including the sort of amorous or melancholy sentiments that can be aired in polite society) that we have already identified as *galant*. The strong pathos of Bach’s B-minor fugue (Ex. 6-3b) would have been as out of place in such company as it would be in the music of Couperin.

**ex. 6-12b François Couperin, *Le Rossignol en amour* (14th
Ordre, no. 1), “Double de Rossignol”**

There was a place for such emotion, of course, and for a style of embellishment that expressed it, in the Italian art associated with the opera; and although Bach wrote no operas, he was well acquainted with the music of his Italian contemporaries and much affected by it. By Bach’s time a great deal of Italian instrumental music aspired to an “operatic” intensity of expression; recall some of the “frightening” work of Corelli and Vivaldi from the previous chapter. And there was a concomitant style of instrumental embellishment, allied to, and perhaps in part derived from, the *fioritura* of the castrati and the other virtuosi of the Italian opera stage.

Italianate ornamentation was “free,” or so the story went. In fact it was governed by just as many rules or conventions as the French, but it was applied with a much broader brush—not to single “graced” notes, but to the intervals between notes, even to whole phrases. In effect it meant making up your own “double” on the spot. Such a

deed required real composing skills—a ready “ear” for harmony and counterpoint at the least—and was therefore far more a creative act than French ornamentation. But of course the extent to which a fully embellished Italian instrumental solo was really a spontaneous invention, rather than a studied and memorized exercise, must have varied greatly from performer to performer, just as it did in the opera house.

Even more than the French, Italian ornamentation was a practice that had to be learned by listening and emulating. Such written guides as there are consist not of tables or rules but of models for imitation. The most widely distributed and influential publication of this type was an edition of Corelli’s solo sonatas issued in 1716 (two years after the composer’s death) by the Amsterdam printer Estienne Roger, in which all the slow movements were fitted out with an alternate line showing “*les agréments des Adagio de cet ouvrage, composés par M. Corelli, comme il les joue*”: “the embellishments to the Adagios, composed by Mr. Corelli, just the way he plays them” (see Ex. 6-13).

The claim may be doubted. There was no guarantee in those piratical days that any composer had actually written what was published under his name, and it is downright implausible to think that Corelli needed to write such things out for himself. Nevertheless, even if these are not “Corelli’s graces” (as an English publisher who had pirated them from Roger called them), they fairly represented the going style, as attested by many other publications, manuscripts, and compositions in the Italianate manner.

Among the most telling such corroborating documents is the slow movement—marked “Andante,” but in style a true Adagio—from Bach’s *Concerto nach italiänischem Gusto* (“Concerto after the Italian Taste”), probably written at Cöthen but published in the second volume of his *Clavier-Übung*, issued in Leipzig in 1735 (Ex. 6-14). This bracing composition, usually called the “Italian Concerto” in English, is a tour de force for composer and performer alike. The compositional feat is the transfer to a single keyboard instrument of the whole complex Italian concertato style, with its interplay of solo and tutti. A single keyboard instrument, that is, but not a single keyboard: large harpsichords, like pipe organs, had double keyboards that controlled different sets (or “ranks”) of strings. By engaging a device called a coupler that made both keyboards respond to a single touch, Bach could achieve a solo/tutti contrast between keyboards. And so he did in the rollicking outer movements, cast in ritornello style.

In the slow middle movement, Bach reverted to the older ground bass format, over which he cast a lyrical (“*cantabile*”) line for a metaphorical Corelli who pulls out all the stops in embellishing a hypothetical “original” tune (suggested in an alternate staff at the beginning of the music as given in Ex. 6-14). Note that Bach throws in a few “French” ornaments as well, especially on entering pitches and melodic high points. These do not so much represent a mixture of styles (though as a German, Bach would not have balked at such a mixture) as they do a means of achieving the equivalent of a dynamic accent, unavailable on the harpsichord. (Indeed, when transferring cantabile lines from the harpsichord to other instruments, as in *Le Rossignol en amour*, even Couperin suggests leaving out some of the signed graces, suggesting that French ornaments may actually have originated as a way of compensating for the physical limitations of the instrument.)

Adagio

4+
2

6

7

7
X

6

7

7

6

Grave

4+
2

6

6
5

X

Detailed description: This musical score is for a piece in G major, 3/4 time, marked Adagio. It consists of three systems of music. The first system has two staves (treble and bass). The treble staff begins with a quarter rest, followed by a sixteenth-note scale starting on G4, marked with a '+' above the final note. The bass staff starts with a quarter rest, followed by a half note G2, then a quarter note G2. Fretboard diagrams are shown below the bass staff: 4+ on the 2nd fret, 6 on the 6th fret, 7 on the 7th fret, and 7 with an X on the 7th fret. The second system continues the sixteenth-note scale in the treble and has a half note G2 in the bass. The third system features a trill (tr.) on the treble staff and a half note G2 in the bass. The tempo changes to Grave for the final measure, which contains a half note G2 in the treble and a whole note G2 in the bass. Fretboard diagrams for the final system are 4+ on the 2nd fret, 6 on the 6th fret, 6 on the 5th fret, and X on the 7th fret.

First system of musical notation, featuring a treble and bass clef with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). The treble staff contains a melodic line with a long, flowing slur. The bass staff contains a simple accompaniment with a few notes and rests.

Allegro

Second system of musical notation, marked "Allegro". The treble staff features a rapid, repetitive sixteenth-note pattern. The bass staff has a simple accompaniment. The text "Tasto Solo" is written below the bass staff.

Third system of musical notation, continuing the rapid sixteenth-note pattern in the treble staff and the simple accompaniment in the bass staff.

Adagio

Fourth system of musical notation, marked "Adagio". The treble staff has a slower, more melodic line with a slur. The bass staff has a simple accompaniment. Fingering numbers (2, 6, 7, 7, X, X) are written below the bass staff.

Fifth system of musical notation, featuring a treble and bass clef with a key signature of two sharps. The treble staff contains a melodic line with a long, flowing slur. The bass staff contains a simple accompaniment with a few notes and rests. Fingering numbers (6, 7, 7, X, 6) are written below the bass staff.

ex. 6-13 Arcangelo Corelli, Sonata in D major, Op. 5, no. 1

Bach's invigorating keyboard arrangement, so to speak, of an imaginary Italian violin concerto was preceded by many keyboard arrangements of actual concertos. While at Weimar, Bach arranged some nineteen Italian concertos (five for organ, the rest for harpsichord), including several that we looked at in the previous chapter, like Vivaldi's for four violins and Marcello's for oboe. Making these arrangements is undoubtedly how Bach gained his mastery not only of the trappings of the Italian style but of the driving Italianate harmonic practices that he took so much further than his models, marking him as not just an imitator but a potent and very idiosyncratic emulator.

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Bach: Orchestral music

French overture

STYLISTIC HYBRIDS

Chapter: CHAPTER 6 Class of 1685 (I)

Source: MUSIC IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

By the time he reached creative maturity, Bach had thus assimilated and encompassed all the national idioms of his day. Indeed, like all Germans he made a specialty of commingling them; but his amalgamations were singular, even eccentric. They disclosed what even today can seem an unrivaled creative imagination, but one that was uniquely complicated, inexhaustibly crafty, even (while always technically assured and unfailingly alluring) at times incomprehensible and disturbing.

Hypothetical "original" before gracing

Andante

piano

forte

ex. 6-14 J. S. Bach, slow movement from the “Italian Concerto” with the Incipit of a hypothetical “original”

A relatively mild and sensuously ingratiating example of Bach’s stylistic complexity is the opening movement of his third orchestral suite or *ouverture*. It was possibly composed at Cöthen, but Bach revised it in Leipzig for performance by the Collegium Musicum, a society of professional instrumentalists and students (founded by Telemann in 1702) that gave weekly afternoon concerts at a popular local “coffee garden.” Bach became its director in 1729.

In its general outline, the movement follows the plan of a “French overture,” such as we encountered in chapter 3 in the work of Lully and Rameau, although Bach’s is far lengthier and more elaborate than any functional theatrical overture. The use of this format was standard operating procedure for German orchestral suites and the reason why they were called “ouvertures” to begin with. A regal march in binary form, full of pompous dotted rhythms, frames an energetic fugue. The march (Ex. 6-15a) sounds more regal than ever owing to the size and makeup of the orchestra, which in addition to the standard complement of strings includes a pair of oboes to reinforce the violin parts, and a blaring contingent of three trumpets—the first of them in the sky-high *clarino* register that only specialists could negotiate—plus timpani.

ex. 6-15a J. S. Bach, Overture (Orchestral Suite) no. 3, I, beginning

The use of this brass and percussion unit is the first level of stylistic admixture here, for the virtuoso brass ensemble was a fixture of German municipal music-making. Such players, known as *Stadt Pfeifer* (“town pipers”), had been employed by free German towns as combined watchmen and signal corps as long as there had been free towns—that is, since the fourteenth century—and by the eighteenth century they formed a venerable guild or trades hierarchy of highly skilled musicians, to which admission was severely restricted. Their civic duties included performance at all official celebrations and ceremonial observances, and also regular morning and evening concerts (called *Turmmusik* or “tower music” because they were played from the tower of the *Rathaus*, the town council hall) that signaled the beginning and end of the public day.

Along with Nuremberg to the south, Leipzig was one of the greatest centers for municipal music. The most illustrious *Stadt pfeifer* in history, to judge by his contemporary reputation and his written legacy, was a Silesian named Johann Pezel (or Petzoldt, 1639–94), who worked in Leipzig from 1664 until 1681 (even at one point aspiring to the position of town cantor) and published five books containing tower and occasional music of all kinds. But if Pezel was the greatest of his line, surely the runner-up was the long-lived Gottfried Reiche (1667–1734), a renowned trumpeter whose period of service in Leipzig overlapped with Bach’s. Although Reiche was nearing sixty by the time Bach came to Leipzig, he was a uniquely qualified clarino specialist, and Bach wrote many of his most brilliant first trumpet parts for him, including the one in the third orchestral suite.

Thus far we have a French courtly overture played by a band that included German town musicians. But stylistic mixture does not stop there. In the fugal middle section of the overture (Ex. 6-15b), the expositions are played by the full orchestra, the *Stadt pfeifer*s capping them off with a blast at cadences. The episodes, however, are scored for a virtuoso solo violinist backed up with a string *ripieno*—an Italian concerto ensemble! And the fugue indeed behaves

like a concerto if we regard the expositions, which after all always have the same thematic content, as ritornellos. So the panorama is complete: specifically French, Italian, and German elements have fused into a unique configuration that at the same time uncovers unsuspected affinities between forms and genres of diverse parentage and customary function.



fig. 6-10 Gottfried Reiche, the Leipzig clarino trumpeter. Portrait by E. G. Haussmann, 1727.

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ex. 6-15b J. S. Bach, Overture (Orchestral Suite) no. 3, I, end of fugal exposition and beginning of episode

Indeed, it can seem as though Bach's special talent—or special mission—was to uncover the hidden affinities that united the ostensibly diverse. Or to put it another way, by creating his unique and unsuspected joinings of what were normally separate entities, Bach knew how to make the familiar newly strange. As a self-conscious artistic tendency, such an aim is usually thought to be quint-essentially “modern”; it sits oddly with Bach's reputation (in his own day as well as ours) as an old-fashioned composer. And yet his way of uniting within himself both the superannuated and the unheard-of was perhaps Bach's crowning “synthetic” achievement.

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Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

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Bach: Orchestral music

Concerto: Origins to 1750

THE "BRANDENBURG" CONCERTOS

Chapter: CHAPTER 6 Class of 1685 (I)

Source: MUSIC IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

These ideas apply with particular conviction to Bach's most familiar body of instrumental music and can serve to "defamiliarize" it interestingly, perhaps illuminatingly. In 1721, while serving at Cöthen, Bach gathered up six instrumental concertos that he had composed over the last decade or so, wrote them out in a new "fair copy" or presentation manuscript, and sent them off with a suitably obsequious calligraphic dedication page, elegantly composed in French (the German court language), to Christian Ludwig, the Margrave of Brandenburg (Fig. 6-11), hoping for an appointment to the latter's court in Berlin. (Several of Bach's best known compositions, in fact, were written or assembled in connection with job- or title-hunting, often unsuccessful; they include his "B-minor Mass," about which more in the next chapter.)

The rest of the story is well known: the Margrave never acknowledged receipt of the manuscript and seems never to have had the concertos performed. Their fame dates from the acquisition of the calligraphic manuscript by the royal library in Berlin and their subsequent publication as a set. To the Margrave they must have seemed bizarre, and they were most likely quite unsuited to the resources of his court, for in their scoring they all differ radically from one another, and not one of them uses a standard orchestral complement. Their fame, plus the sheer fact that "The Brandenburg Concertos" have so long been standard repertory works, has hidden their strangeness behind a cloak of canonical familiarity. (So has the esthetic attitude that in the nineteenth century gave rise to the very idea of a standard repertory, which paradoxically regarded uniqueness as a "standard" feature of masterworks worthy of inclusion.) Perhaps the most absorbing exercise of the historical imagination, where Bach's music is concerned, is the recovery of that hidden strangeness.

*A Son Altesse Royale
Monseigneur
Chrétien Louis
Margraf de Brandenbourg
Monseigneur.*

Comme j'eus illy ains couple d'années, le bonheur de me faire entendre à Votre Altesse Royale, en voyant de ses ordres, de que je remarquai alors, qu'Elle prenoit quelque plaisir aux petits talents que le Ciel m'a donné pour la Musique, & qu'en prenant congé de Votre Altesse Royale, Elle voulut bien me faire l'honneur de me commander de Lui envoyer quelques pièces de ma Composition: j'ai donc selon ses très gracieux ordres, pris la liberté de rendre mes très-humbles devoirs à Votre Altesse Royale, par les présents Concertos, que j'ai accommodés à plusieurs Instruments; La priant très-humblement de se vouloir pas juger leur importance, à la rigueur du goût fin & délicat, que tout le monde sçait qu'Elle a pour les pièces musicales, mais de tirer plutôt en beaucoup de considération, le présent respect de la très-humble obéissance que je touche à Lui tenir par là. Pour le reste, Monseigneur, je supplie très-humblement Votre Altesse Royale, d'avoir la bonté de continuer ses bonnes grâces envers moi, et d'être persuadé que je n'ai rien tant à cœur, que de pouvoir être employé en des occasions plus dignes d'Elle et de son service, moi qui suis avec son Altesse sans pareil

*Cöthen. le 29 Mars
1721*

*Monseigneur
De Votre Altesse Royale*

*Le très-humble & très-obéissant serviteur
Jean-Christoph Bach.*

fig. 6-11 Bach’s calligraphic dedication of the Brandenburg Concertos.

Merely to list the ensembles the concertos call for is to make a start toward grasping their eccentricity. The first concerto, in F major, has for its *concertino* or solo group a weirdly assorted combination of two horns, three oboes, a bassoon, and a *violino piccolo* (a smaller, higher-pitched type of violin, then rare, now altogether obsolete). The movements are an equally weird assortment, mixing ritornello movements and courtly dances. The second concerto, also in F major, uses four soloists, their instruments starkly contrasting in their means of tone production and strength of voice: in order of appearance they are violin, oboe, recorder (end-blown whistle flute), and clarino trumpet. Balancing the recorder’s whisper with the trumpet’s blast must have been as daunting a prospect then as it is now. The third concerto, in G major, has no *concertino* at all; it is scored for a unique ripieno ensemble comprising nine string soloists: three violins, three violas, and three cellos, plus a continuo of bass and harpsichord. The fourth, also in G major, uses a violin and two unusual recorders pitched on G (designated *flûtes d’echo* in the score).

The last two concertos are the most bizarrely scored of all. The fifth, in D major, has for its *concertino* a violin, a transverse flute (the wooden ancestor of the modern metal flute), and—of all things!—a harpsichord in a fully written-out, soloistic (rather than continuo) capacity. This is apparently the earliest of all solo keyboard concertos. To us it seems the beginning of a long line, but no one could have foreseen that when Bach had the idea. The sixth concerto, in B-flat major, finally does away with the otherwise ubiquitous solo violin. Indeed, it banishes the violin from the orchestra altogether—something for which there seems to be no precedent in the prior (or for that matter, the subsequent) history of the concerto, which is so intimately bound up with the history of the violin.

Instead, the sixth concerto promotes two violas, normally the least conspicuous members of the ripieno, to soloist position, and dragoons a pair of viols (*viole da gamba*), not normally a part of the orchestra at all but soft-toned chamber music instruments, to fill the gap left in the middle of the texture by the “elevation” of the violas. Like the third concerto, the sixth minimizes the distinction between solo and ripieno; the concerto requires only seven instruments for performance—the two violas, the two gambas, and a continuo of cello, bass, and harpsichord.

Were these bizarrely fanciful and colorful scorings the product of sheer caprice, meant as “ear candy” and nothing more? Were they the product of immediate need or personal convenience? (Bach’s patron at Cöthen played the gamba; Bach himself, of course, was a matchless keyboard virtuoso.) Or were they somehow meaningful, in a way that more normally scored or “abstract” instrumental music was not? These are questions to which answers can only be speculative. Such questions, to the historian, are in one sense the most frustrating kind, but in another sense the most fascinating.

To answer them, it is necessary to ask other questions. Was the standard concerto scoring, or the standard makeup of an orchestra, really “abstract” and nonsignificant? Or did it, too, mean something? If so, what did its alteration or negation mean? And even more basically, *to whom did it mean whatever it meant?*

Recent research on the history of the orchestra shows that, from the very beginning, the orchestra—the most complex of all musical ensembles—was often explicitly (and even more often, it would probably follow, tacitly) regarded as a social microcosm, a compact mirror of society. The orchestra, like society itself, was assumed to be an inherently hierarchical entity. This assumption was already implicitly invoked a few paragraphs back when the violas were casually described as the “least conspicuous members of the ripieno.” Their inconspicuousness was the result of the kind of music they played: harmonic filler, for the most part, having neither any substantial tunes to contribute nor the harmonically defining function of the bass to fulfill. Musically, their role could fairly be described as being, while necessary, distinctly less important than those of their fellow players above (the violins) and below (the continuo instruments). Even today, the violas (and the “second violins”) in an orchestra—the “inner parts”—are proverbially subordinate players, by implication social inferiors. Our everyday language bears this out whenever we speak of “playing second fiddle” to someone else.

And if “second fiddle” implies inferiority, then “first fiddle” tacitly implies a superior condition. In Bach’s day, before there were baton conductors, the first violinist was in fact the orchestra leader. (Even today, when the leadership role has long since passed to the silent dictator with the stick, the first violinist is still called the “concertmaster.”) So when Bach banishes the violins from the ensemble, as he does in the sixth concerto, and puts the violas in their place, it is hard to avoid the impression that a social norm—that of hierarchy—has been upended.

Or consider the fifth concerto, which begins (Ex. 6-16a) with a fiery tutti played by every instrument in the ensemble

except the flute. For one actually watching the performance as well as listening to it—a point that may require some underscoring in an age when our primary relationship to musical sound may be to its recorded and therefore disembodied variety—the clear implication is that the flute is to be the protagonist, and that the rest of the instruments belong to the ripieno. So the fact that the violin and the obbligato harpsichord continue to play after the first tutti cadence is already a surprise.

At first it is not entirely clear that the harpsichord part in the solo episodes is a full social equal to the flute and the violin; continuo players often improvised elaborate right-hand parts in chamber music, and Bach himself was known to be especially adept at doing so. The triplets in measure 10, unprecedented in the opening tutti but later much developed by the other soloists, can be read in retrospect as the first clue that the harpsichord is to be no mere accompanist. The triplets, like the slurred pairs of eighth notes in the second solo episode (already identified in the B-minor fugue from the WTC as “sighs”), are unmistakable emblems of what Bach would have called the *affettuoso* (tender) style. (They were conspicuous in the castrato music sampled in chapter 4.) In their contrast with the agitated repeated sixteenth notes of the ritornello, recalling the dramatic *concitato* style that goes all the way back to Monteverdi, the triplets and slurs are a signal to us that the dulcet solos and the spirited tutti are going to be somewhat at odds in this concerto, and that the “scenario” of the piece will involve their reconciliation—or else their failure to achieve reconciliation.

It is the harpsichord that impedes reconciliation. By the time the first “remote” modulation gets made (to B minor), the harpsichord has already made it clear that it will not be content with its usual service role. Indeed, it is determined to dominate the show. In m. 47 it actually abandons the bass line (leaving it contemptuously to the viola and ripieno violin) and launches into a toccata-like riff in thirty-second notes that lasts for only three measures (Ex. 6-16b), but that succeeds in knocking things for a loop—a condition symbolized first by the failure of an attempted tutti in the tonic to achieve its cadence, and then by the long dreamlike tutti that marks the movement’s FOP in the very unusual mediant key of F# minor (iii).

Allegro

Fl.

Vln. Solo

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

B.c. accompagnamento

4

Musical score for Brandenburg Concerto no. 5, I, opening, measures 7-9. The score is in G major and 3/4 time. It features a harpsichord part with a continuous sixteenth-note pattern in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. The flute and violin parts enter in measure 7 with a melodic line. The strings provide a steady accompaniment.

Musical score for Brandenburg Concerto no. 5, I, opening, measures 10-12. The harpsichord part continues with the sixteenth-note pattern, marked *piano*. The flute and violin parts continue their melodic line. The strings provide a steady accompaniment.

ex. 6-16a J. S. Bach, Brandenburg Concerto no. 5, I, opening

In this long section (mm. 71–101) a new theme, related neither to the ritornello nor to the original soloist's material, is traded off between the flute and violin soloists (Ex. 6-16c) while the harpsichord keeps up a relentless tramp of sixteenth notes. Eventually the other soloists' stamina gives out and the music becomes entirely harmonic, a slow march around the circle of fifths in which nothing sounds but arpeggios at various levels of speed. At m. 95 the motion is further arrested (Ex. 6-16d), with the long-held dissonances in the flute and violin, trilled pianissimo, seeming to go out of time as if everyone were falling asleep—everyone, that is, except the harpsichord and its continuo cohort, the cello.

47

musical score for measures 47-48, featuring multiple staves with treble and bass clefs, including dynamic markings like *piano*.

49

musical score for measures 49-50, featuring multiple staves with treble and bass clefs, including dynamic markings like *piuissimo* and *piano*.

51

ex. 6-16b J. S. Bach, Brandenburg Concerto no. 5, I, mm. 47–51

At m. 101 everyone snaps out of their trance with a ritornello on the dominant that seems to be pointing the way toward home. The flute and violin conspire to direct the harmony tonicward with a sequential episode, and succeed in bringing about a small cadence on I that the harpsichord seems to abet with an entrance that apes its very first solo. The flute and violin join in with reminiscences of *their* first solos, and when the ripieno chimes in to cap things off with a full repetition of the opening ritornello—the normal ending for a movement like this—the piece seems about to end on the expected note of fully achieved concord.

But it has all been a diabolical ruse, and the movement, which has already reached more or less average Vivaldian length, turns out to be only half over. On the third beat of m. 125 the end so agreeably promised is aborted by a classic deceptive cadence, engineered by the bass, which (in a manner that recalls the Toccata in F, explored in the previous chapter) assaults the tonic D with a fiercely dissonant and chromatic C-natural that forces the music out of its tonal bed, so to speak, and forces it to keep going at least long enough to repair the abruptness. A new purchase on the same ritornello is thwarted again, once more by the bass, which feints to the third of the chord rather than the root, producing an inversion that cannot support a close.

There will be no more attempts at closure for a long time, because the harpsichord, as if seizing its moment, launches once again into the toccata riff it had initiated some ninety or so measures earlier. and this time it proves to

be truly irrepresible. The thirty-second notes keep up for fifteen measures, changing in figuration from scales to decorated slow arpeggios, to very wide and rapid arpeggios. With every new phase in the harpsichord's antics comes a corresponding loss of energy in the other instruments (now clearly their former accompanist's accompanists), until they simply drop out, leaving their obstreperous companion alone in play (Ex. 6-16e).

The first system of the musical score shows measures 71 and 72. The harpsichord part (top staff) is marked *pianissimo* and features a series of wide, rapid arpeggios. The other instruments (flute, violin, viola, cello, and double bass) are marked *pianissimo* or *piano* and play a steady, rhythmic accompaniment. The harpsichord's part is characterized by a series of wide, rapid arpeggios that change in figuration from scales to decorated slow arpeggios, to very wide and rapid arpeggios.

The second system of the musical score shows measures 73 and 74. The harpsichord part (top staff) continues its series of wide, rapid arpeggios. The other instruments (flute, violin, viola, cello, and double bass) are marked *pianissimo* or *piano* and play a steady, rhythmic accompaniment. The harpsichord's part is characterized by a series of wide, rapid arpeggios that change in figuration from scales to decorated slow arpeggios, to very wide and rapid arpeggios.

ex. 6-16c J. S. Bach, Brandenburg Concerto no. 5, I, mm. 71-74

95

pianissimo

pianissimo

95

ex. 6-16d J. S. Bach, Brandenburg Concerto no. 5, I, mm. 95–99

What follows is something no eighteenth-century listener could ever have anticipated. It had no precedents of any kind in ensemble music—and (outside of a few outlandish violin concertos by latterday Italian virtuosi like Pietro Locatelli and Francesco Maria Veracini, who probably never heard of Bach) it would have no successors, either. The unimaginably lengthy passage for the *cembalo solo senza stromenti*, as Bach puts it (“the harpsichord alone without [the other] instruments”), is an absolutely unique event in the “High Baroque” concerto repertory.

151

Musical score for measures 151-152. The score is in G major (one sharp) and common time. It features a keyboard part with a complex rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes in both hands. The upper strings (Violin I, Violin II, and Viola) play a simple melodic line of quarter notes. The lower strings (Violin III, Violoncello, and Double Bass) play a sustained bass line with a few notes in the second measure.

153

Musical score for measures 153-154. The score is in G major and common time. The keyboard part continues with its rhythmic pattern. The upper strings play a melodic line with some rests. The lower strings play a sustained bass line. In measure 154, the keyboard part has a fermata over the final notes, and the text "Cembalo solo senza stromenti" is written below the staff.

Cembalo solo senza stromenti

The image displays two systems of musical notation for J.S. Bach's Brandenburg Concerto no. 5, I, measures 151-59. The first system, labeled '155', shows measures 151-153. The second system, labeled '158', shows measures 154-156. The notation includes staves for the harpsichord and the other instruments. The harpsichord part features a prominent solo with intricate sixteenth-note patterns and a dramatic cadenza.

ex. 6-16e J. S. Bach, Brandenburg Concerto no. 5, I, mm. 151–59

It is often called a *cadenza*, on a vague analogy to the kind of pyrotechnics that opera singers like Farinelli would indulge in before the final ritornello in an *opera seria* aria. And perhaps Bach's listeners might eventually have made such a connection as the harpsichord's phantasmagoria wore on and the remaining instruments sat silent for an unheard-of length of time. But the actual style of the solo is more in keeping with what Bach's contemporaries would have called a *capriccio*—a willfully bizarre instrumental composition that made a show of departing from the usual norms of style. (Locatelli would actually call the extended—and optional—unaccompanied display passages in his violin concertos *capriccii*, and later collected them into a book of études in all the keys called *L'Arte del violino*; but even these were passages for the expected soloist, not a usurping would-be Farinelli from the continuo section!) Bach's *capriccio* begins like a virtuoso reworking of the original soloist's themes—the previously “dulcet” music now played with fiery abandon. Later there is a return to the relentless tread of sixteenth notes that had accompanied the F#-minor episode described above. Finally, there is a mind-boggling explosion of toccata fireworks that lasts for over twenty measures before resuming the earlier thematic elaboration and bringing it at last to cadence. By the time it has run its course and allowed the tutti finally to repeat its opening ritornello one last time and bring the movement to a belated close, the harpsichord's *cadenza/capriccio/tocatta* has lasted sixty-five measures, close to one-third the length of the entire movement, and completely distorted its shape.

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Bach: Chamber music

Obligato

“OBBLIGATO” WRITING AND/OR ARRANGING

Chapter: CHAPTER 6 Class of 1685 (I)

Source: MUSIC IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

The remaining movements in the Fifth Brandenburg Concerto have nothing to compare with this disruption. By now the harpsichord has made its point, and its status as a full partner to the other soloists is something the listener will take for granted, so there is no need to insist on it. The middle movement, explicitly marked *affettuoso*, is actual chamber music, scored for the soloists alone. Although played by three instruments, it is really a quartet, since the left and right hands of the keyboard have differing roles. The left hand, as always, is the continuo part, sometimes joined in this function by the right hand (where figures are marked) to accompany the other soloists at the imitative beginnings of sections. Elsewhere, the right hand takes part on an equal footing with the flute and violin, sometimes participating in imitative textures along with them, at other times alternating with them in a kind of antiphony.

This kind of obbligato harpsichord writing in chamber music is something one finds a great deal in Bach and in other German composers, too, especially Telemann. It may have been the conceptual origin of the Fifth Brandenburg Concerto, in which an obbligato-style chamber ensemble is turned into a concertino. Usually, in ensembles of this kind, the obbligato harpsichord is paired with one other instrument to make a sort of trio sonata in which the right hand at the keyboard is a “soloist” and the left hand the “accompanist.” Bach wrote three sonatas of this kind for flute and harpsichord, six for violin and harpsichord, and (at Cöthen, where his patron was an amateur of the instrument) three for viola da gamba and harpsichord.

The first gamba and harpsichord sonata actually began life as a trio sonata for two flutes and basso continuo before Bach transcribed it for the more compact medium. This suggests that any trio sonata might be performed with a harpsichordist taking two of the parts. (Bach surely did this sort of thing often at Cöthen and later with his Collegium Musicum at Leipzig.) In other words, the use of the obbligato harpsichord, at least when it does not involve highly idiomatic toccata-like passagework, could be looked at as a performance practice rather than a hard-and-fast compositional genre. The second gamba sonata does have a toccata-like passage in the last movement, suggesting that it was originally written for the obbligato medium, not merely adapted to it. The third gamba sonata, in G minor, is especially odd and interesting: a very extended affair with a first movement cast like a concerto in ritornello form. This, too, is a type of sonata for which there are precedents in Germany and only in Germany, where it was called a *Sonata auf Concertenart* (“Sonata in concerto style”).

The point is that performance genres and media were much more fluid in Bach’s day than they later became. For Bach, a piece did not necessarily have the kind of definitive form it later assumed with, say, Beethoven (and which, thanks largely to Beethoven, we now expect all pieces to have). A piece was always fair game for cannibalization in other pieces, for transplantation to other media, or seemingly arbitrary adaptation. The line between creating it and performing it was not as finely drawn as we might nowadays tend to assume. Thus it should not surprise us to learn that Bach arranged many violin concertos, including some otherwise lost ones by himself, to perform as harpsichord concertos with his Collegium Musicum, or that individual movements from the Brandenburg Concertos turn up in other works, even vocal ones.

The final movement of the Fifth Brandenburg Concerto is an excellent example of “fused” genres. It seems to have a hard time deciding whether it is a fugue, a gigue, or a concerto. But of course it is all of those things at once. We have already seen how often the two sections of a gigue begin with little fugal expositions. In the Fifth Brandenburg Concerto, the exposition is extended into quite an elaborate affair—in four parts, two of them assigned to the harpsichord—that lasts 28 measures before the ripieno joins in to second it with another extended exposition of 50 measures’ length, the whole 78-bar complex in effect making up one huge ritornello.

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Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

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Bach: Background, style, influences

Enlightenment

WHAT DOES IT ALL MEAN?

Chapter: CHAPTER 6 Class of 1685 (I)

Source: MUSIC IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

Here, too, there is significant role reversal: in a way the soloists, who begin alone, and the ripieno, who follow, have exchanged functions. Once again a breach of traditional social hierarchies is suggested, albeit nothing on the scale of the colossal trespass or transgression committed by the harpsichord in the first movement, which one commentator has aptly compared to a hijacking.³ What do all these reversals, mixtures, and transgressions signify?

For a long time they were thought to signify only the fertility of Bach's composerly imagination. And yet (without wishing to slight that imagination in any way) interpreting them so may not do their strangeness justice. Historians have lately begun to wonder whether, given the frequency with which the orchestra was compared with a social organism and described in terms of social or military hierarchy, Bach's musical transgressions might not resonate with ideas of social transgression.

Two such hypotheses have attracted scholarly attention (and provided the grounds, it should be obvious, for a great deal of scholarly debate). One, put forth by Susan McClary in an article that appeared during Bach's tricentennial year, 1985, straightforwardly compared the harpsichord's behavior with political subversion. By suggesting "the possibility of social overthrow, and the violence implied by such overthrow," McClary argued, Bach may have been weighing the pros and cons of "an ideology that wants to encourage freedom of expression while preserving social harmony."⁴ Such a vision or fantasy did indeed preoccupy many social thinkers in the eighteenth century. Historians refer to the period during which this vision gained ground as the age of "Enlightenment," an age of secularism and anti-aristocratic thinking during which the ideals of an economically empowered middle class were cast as "universal" progressive ideals. In McClary's view, the harpsichord's behavior was a kind of symbolic "storming of the Bastille" some seventy years before the French Revolution turned Enlightened fantasy into political reality.⁵ She suggested that the concerto as a whole symbolically enacted "the exhilaration as well as the risks of upward mobility, the simultaneous desire for and resistance of concession to social harmony."

Resistance to this hypothesis was swift and stout, fueled on the one hand by the absence of any corroborating evidence that Bach was interested in—or even knew about—the political theories of the Enlightenment, and on the other hand by an unwillingness to let the music alone provide the evidence. Yet once the idea had been broached that unusual musical behavior could be, and probably was, motivated by (or at least resonant with) ideas or circumstances that were abroad in the wider world, it became difficult to ignore the possibility without appearing to slight or disregard the unusualness of the music, and thereby diminish it.

An alternative proposal was offered by Michael Marissen, a Bach scholar who sympathized with McClary's general tendency to seek explanations for exceptional musical phenomena in the world of historical ideas, but who had misgivings about her ascription to Bach of social ideas that were so little shared among German Lutherans. Following Luther himself, Bach and his co-religionists entertained conservative social attitudes and placed great value on the stability of existing institutions—exactly what Bach's harpsichordist (indeed, Bach himself, as the imagined protagonist of the part) seemed bent on destroying.

And yet, as Marissen pointed out, Lutheran theologians, while supporting the necessity of social hierarchies on earth, have always reminded believers that there will be no social hierarchy in the world to come. Bach is known to have actively endorsed the notion that accepted musical hierarchies also represent "the God-ordained order of things in this world."⁶ And therefore, Marissen suggests, if Bach appears to violate or transgress those musical hierarchies, the aim "is not to show that Bach advocated or foresaw revolutionary action against contemporary social hierarchies

but rather to suggest that he may be telling or reminding his listeners of the significant Lutheran viewpoint that such figurations have only to do with the present world and therefore are without ultimate significance." If this view is accepted, then an apparent contradiction in McClary's argument would seem to have been resolved, while leaving the social commentary in place. And yet to accept this view of the Fifth Brandenburg Concerto may require of us an even greater tour de force of historical imagination, leading to an even greater sense of Bach's strangeness. McClary's reading of the concerto, even if it is anachronistic or foreign to Bach himself, nevertheless resonates strongly with the beliefs and values of many listeners today, especially in the United States of America, a country founded on the Enlightenment principles that occupy the foreground of McClary's discussion (a discussion that perhaps could only have been authored by a twentieth-century American).

Marissen's reading, while it attributes to Bach himself no foreign or anachronistic belief, is fundamentally foreign to the beliefs and values of Bach's likely listeners today and to the "use" that we are likely to make of the music. It asks us to believe that a set of instrumental concertos, composed in one secular environment (the domestic musical establishment of a German prince) and destined to be consumed in another (today's public concerts and recording industry), nevertheless expresses in its essence a fundamentally religious outlook on the world. By implication it requires us to be prepared to regard all of Bach's secular music as possibly containing a hidden religious advisory.

Of course (as Marissen reminds us), Bach wrote for a very different audience from the one that he willy-nilly addresses today, and a much smaller one. That audience might well have been primed to receive messages we no longer look for in such music. And the enthusiastic embrace today's audience has given Bach's music is surely enough to show that appreciating its religious message is by no means a requirement for enjoying it. And yet there may be ways in which the idea that Bach was an essentially religious composer even in his secular instrumental works might nevertheless enhance modern understanding and enjoyment of his music, even by listeners who will never set foot in a Lutheran church or set much store by the religious message Bach's works might embody.

To test the notion, we will return in the next chapter to Handel, of all Bach's German contemporaries perhaps the most secular in inspiration and expression, and give his work a look of comparable closeness. That work will chiefly be vocal, since Handel's chief contribution was to vocal genres. But then so was Bach's, although the place of his instrumental music in the standard repertory has somewhat occluded and belied that important fact. And so after revisiting Handel, we will return once more to Bach and to the vocal music that reveals him as an explicitly, not merely an implicitly, religious composer.

Notes:

(3) Susan McClary, "The Blasphemy of Talking Politics during Bach Year," in *Music and Society: The Politics of Composition, Performance and Reception*, eds. S. McClary and R. Leppert (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 26.

(4) *Ibid.*, p. 41.

(5) *Ibid.*, p. 40.

(6) Michael Marissen, *The Social and Religious Designs of J. S. Bach's Brandenburg Concertos* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), pp. 114–15.

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Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

CHAPTER 7 Class of 1685 (II)

Handel's Operas and Oratorios; Bach's Cantatas and Passions; Domenico Scarlatti

Chapter: CHAPTER 7 Class of 1685 (II)

Source: MUSIC IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

HANDEL ON THE STRAND

The paradox is that Handel, the worldly spirit, is most characteristically represented in today's repertory by his vocal music on sacred subjects, while Bach, the quintessential religious spirit, is largely represented by secular instrumental works. And yet it may be less a paradox than a testimonial to the thoroughly secular, theatrical atmosphere in which all music is now patronized and consumed, and the essentially secular, theatrical spirit that informs even Handel's ostensibly sacred work—a spirit that modern audiences instinctively recognize and easily respond to. The modern audience, in short, recognizes and claims its own from both composers; and in this the modern audience behaves the way audiences have always behaved. Nor is it in any way surprising: Handel, not Bach, was present at the creation of “the modern audience.” Indeed, he helped create it.

Not that Handel's secular instrumental output was by any means inconsiderable or obscure. We have already had a look at one of his two dozen concerti grossi, works that (simply because they were published) were far better known in their day than the Brandenburg Concertos or any other instrumental ensemble works of Bach (see Exx. 5-13 and 14). Handel also composed a number of solo organ concertos for himself to perform between the acts of his oratorios. In their origins they were thus theatrical works, but two books of them were published (one of them as a posthumous tribute) and became every organist's property.



fig. 7-1a Portrait by Christoph Platzer, ca. 1710, believed to be the twenty-five-year-old Handel, who was then completing his Italian apprenticeship.



fig. 7-1b Full-length statue of Handel by Louis François Roubillac (1705–1762).

In addition, more than three dozen solo and trio sonatas by Handel survive, of which many also circulated widely in print during his lifetime. Except for a single trio sonata and some instrumental canons in a miscellaneous collection called *The Musical Offering*, and a single church cantata published by a municipal council to commemorate a civic occasion, the only works of Bach that were published during his lifetime were the keyboard compositions that he published himself.

Handel's largest instrumental compositions, like Bach's, were orchestral suites. And as befits the history of the genre, Handel's orchestral suites were among the relatively few compositions of his that arose directly out of his employment by the Hanoverian kings of England. One was a kind of super-suite, an enormous medley of instrumental pieces of every description (but mostly dances) composed for performance on a barge that kept abreast of George I's pleasure boat during a royal outing on the River Thames on 17 July 1717, later published as "Handel's Celebrated Water Musick." A whole day's musical entertainment, it furnished enough pieces for three separate sequences (suites in F, D, and G) as arranged by the publisher.

Handel's other big orchestral suite was composed for an enormous wind band (twenty-four oboes, twelve bassoons, nine trumpets, nine horns, and timpani, to which strings parts were added on publication) and performed on 27 April

1749 as part of the festivities surrounding the Peace of Aix-la-Chapelle that ended the War of the Austrian Succession. This was a great diplomatic triumph for George II, who had personally led his troops in battle (the last time any British monarch has done so) and won important trade and colonial concessions from the other European powers, including a monopoly on the shipping of slaves from Africa to Spanish America. Handel's suite was published as "The Musick for the Royal Fireworks." In arrangements for modern symphony orchestra by the English conductor Sir Hamilton Harty, these suites of Handel's were for a while staples of the concert repertoire—especially in England, where they served as a reminder of imperial glory. They are the only Handelian instrumental compositions ever to have gained modern repertory status comparable to that enjoyed by the "Branden-burgs," and they lost it when England lost her empire. Handel's instrumental music was always a sideline, and so it remains for audiences today, even though modern audiences value instrumental music far more highly than did the audience of Handel's time and are much more likely to regard instrumental works as a composer's primary legacy.

For Handel was first and last a composer for the theater, the one domain where Bach never set foot. His main medium was the *opera seria*, the form surveyed in chapter 4. There we had a close look at the genre as such. Here we can concentrate on Handel's particular style as a theatrical composer. For our present purpose it will suffice to boil his entire quarter-century's production for the King's Theatre on the London Strand down to a single consummate example. Such an example will of course have to be a virtuoso aria giving vent to an overpowering emotional seizure; for an *opera seria* role, as we know, was the sum of the attitudes struck in reaction to the complicated but conventionalized unfolding of a moralizing plot in a language that was often neither the composer's nor the audience's. The great opera composer was the one who could give the cut-and-dried, obligatory attitudes a freshly vivid embodiment, and who could convey it essentially without words.

Nothing could serve our purpose better than an aria from *Rodelinda*, one of Handel's most successful operas, first performed at the King's Theatre on 13 February 1725, right in the brilliant middle of Handel's operatic career, and revived many times thereafter. The libretto was an adaptation—by one of Handel's chief literary collaborators, Nicola Francesco Haym, an expatriate Italian Jew who also acted as theater manager, stage director, and continuo cellist—of an earlier opera libretto, produced in Florence, that was based on a play by the French tragedian Pierre Corneille that was based on an episode from a seventh-century chronicle of Lombard (north Italian) history.



fig. 7-2 Caricature of the alto castrato Senesino, the natural soprano Francesca Cuzzoni, and the alto castrato Gaetano Berenstadt in a performance of Handel's opera *Flavio* at the King's Theater, London, in

1723.

The title character is the wife of Bertrarido, the heir to the throne of Lombardy, who has been displaced and forced into exile by a usurper, Grimoaldo, the Duke of Benevento, who has succeeded in his plan with the treasonable aid of Garibaldo, the Duke of Turin, a former ally of Bertrarido. The moral and emotional center of the plot is the steadfastness of Rodelinda's love for Bertrarido and his for her, enabling both their reunion and Bertrarido's restoration to his rightful throne.

The aria on which we focus, Bertrarido's "Vivi, tiranno!" (Ex. 7-1), was actually added to the opera for its first revival, in December 1725, so as to give the noble Bertrarido a more heroic aspect and also to favor the famous alto castrato Senesino with a proper vehicle for displaying his transcendent vocal artistry. It is sung when Bertrarido, having killed Garibaldo off stage, returns to confront Grimoaldo. Instead of killing him outright, he hurls his sword to the ground at his rival's feet and sings, contemptuously:

- A *Vivi, tiranno,* Live, o tyrant!
io t'ho scampato; I have spared thee;
svenami, ingrato, cut me open, ingrateful man,
sfoga il furor! pour out thy rage!
- B *Volli salvarti* I chose to save you
sol per mostrarti only to show you
ch'ho di mia sorte that my fate has granted me
più grande il cor! the greater heart!

Like a good *seria* character, Grimoaldo capitulates to this demonstration of austere magnanimity and gives up his claim to the throne.

"Vivi, tiranno!" is a perfect—and perfectly thrilling—specimen of aria as "concerto for voice and orchestra." Its "A" section is structured exactly like a Vivaldi concerto, with a three-part ritornello that frames the whole, and returns piecemeal in between the vocal episodes (Ex. 7-1a). It symbolizes the aria's affect—stormy indignation, thundering wrath (both as felt by Bertrarido and as summoned forth from Grimoaldo)—with string tremolos that can be related either to the old *stile concitato* or to the onomatopoeical writing we encountered in the storm episode from Vivaldi's "Spring" concerto. As we know from chapter 4, such devices were standard procedure in the "simile arias" that formed the opera *seria* composer's stock-in-trade. The tremolo clearly retains its meaning in Handel's aria, even though there is no explicit simile (that is, no direct textual reference to the storm to which the characters' emotions are being musically compared).

As in the most schematic concerto movement, the vocal part in "Vivi, tiranno!" never quotes or appropriates the music of the ritornello and never carries material over from episode to episode. It is a continually evolving part cast in relief against the dogged constancy of the ritornello. Indeed the opposition of solo and tutti is dramatized beyond anything we have seen in an instrumental concerto. It is made exceptionally tense—even hostile—by having the instruments continually insinuate the ritornello within the episodes whenever the singer pauses for breath, only to be silenced peremptorily on the voice's return. This, too, is expressive of an unusually tense and hostile affect.

The most spectacular representation of rage, however, is reserved to the singer and takes the most appropriate form such a thing can take within a dramatic context.

Tutti Oboe

Vln. I
Ob. I

Vln. II
Ob. II

Vla.

Contrabasso

Ob.

Detailed description: This system shows the first six measures of the score. It includes staves for Violin I and Oboe I, Violin II and Oboe II, Viola, Contrabasso, and Oboe. The music is in 3/4 time with a key signature of two flats. The Oboe parts are marked 'Tutti Oboe'.

7

Tutti Violini

Detailed description: This system shows measures 7-10. It features staves for Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Contrabasso. The Violin parts are marked 'Tutti Violini'. The music continues with rhythmic patterns and rests.

11

Vln. I e Ob. I

Vln. II e Ob. II

Detailed description: This system shows measures 11-14. It includes staves for Violin I and Oboe I, Violin II and Oboe II, Viola, and Contrabasso. The Violin and Oboe parts are marked 'Vln. I e Ob. I' and 'Vln. II e Ob. II' respectively.

15

(senza Obs.)

Vi - vi, ti - ran - no,

Detailed description: This system shows measures 15-18. It includes staves for Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Contrabasso. The Oboe parts are marked '(senza Obs.)'. The lyrics 'Vi - vi, ti - ran - no,' are written below the Contrabasso staff.

ex. 7-1a George Frideric Handel, "Vivi, tiranno!" from *Rodelinda*, Act III, scene 8, mm. 1-18

68

sfo-ga li fu - ror,

72

76

Adagio

sve - tu - mi, in - gra - to, sfo - ga il fur -

80

(runt)

ror!

ex. 7-1b George Frideric Handel, “Vivi, tiranno!” from *Rodelinda*, Act III, scene 8, mm. 68–81

The progressively fierce and florid coloratura in this aria is calculated to coincide on every occurrence with the word *furor*—“rage” itself. The singer literally “pours it out” as the text enjoins, setting Grimoaldo a compelling and exhausting example. The most furious moment of all comes when one of the singer’s rage-symbolizing roulades is cast in counterpoint against the stormy tremolandos in the accompanying parts (Ex. 7-1b).

The aria, in short, is a triumph of dramatically structured music—or of musically structured drama, if that seems a better way of putting it. The “purely musical” or structural aspects of the piece and the representational or expressive ones are utterly enmeshed. There is no way of describing the one without invoking the other. An intricately worked out and monumentally unified, thus potentially self-sufficient, musical structure serves to enhance and elevate the playing-out of a climactic dramatic scene. And the structure, in its lapidary wholeness, with contrasting midsection and suitably embellished reiteration, enables the singer-actor to reach a pitch that is both literally and figuratively beyond the range of spoken delivery.

Comparing Handel’s aria with the *opera seria* arias examined in chapter 4—mostly by actual Italian composers writing for actual Italian audiences—points up the somewhat paradoxical relationship of this great outsider to the

tradition on which he fed. It is Handel who, for many modern historians and the small modern audience that still relishes revivals of *opera seria*, displays the genre at its best, owing to the balancing and tangling of musical and dramatic values just described. Handel's work is indeed more craftsmanly and structurally complex than that of his actual Italian contemporaries, who were much concerned with streamlining and simplifying those very aspects of motivic structure and harmony that Handel continued to revel in.

His work, in short, was at once denser (and, to an audience foreign to the language of the play, perhaps more interesting) and stylistically more conservative. In his far more active counterpoint (just compare his bass line to Vinci's or Broschi's in chapter 4) he affirms his German organist's heritage after all, for all his Italian sojourning and acclimatizing. And by making his music more interesting in its own right than that of his Italian contemporaries, he gave performers correspondingly less room to maneuver and dominate the show.

In this way, for all that Handel seems to dominate modern memory of the *opera seria*, and despite his unquestioned dominance of the local London scene (at least for a while), he was never a truly typical *seria* composer, and as time went on, his work became outmoded. Unlike the actual Italian product, his operas never traveled well but remained a local and somewhat anomalous English phenomenon, admired by foreign visitors but nevertheless regarded as strange. A crisis was reached when Farinelli—the greatest of the castratos, with whose typical vehicles we are already familiar—refused to sing for Handel and in fact joined a rival company set up in ruinous opposition to him. The 1734 pastiche production of *Artaserse* sampled in chapter 4 was in fact a deliberate effort, on the part of the rival Opera of the Nobility, to depose Handel from his preeminence and, Grimoaldo-like, usurp his place in the affections of the London opera audience.



fig. 7-3 A scene from Gay and Pepusch's *Beggar's Opera* as painted in 1729 by William Hogarth. The wife and the lover of Macheath the highwayman plead with their respective fathers to spare his life.

Handel's grip on the London public, or at least its most aristocratic faction, had already been challenged somewhat in the 1720s by a series of easy, tuneful operas by Giovanni Bononcini (1670–1747) imported to London together with their composer, a somewhat older man than Handel but one whose style was more idiomatically Italian and up-to-date. Another bad omen for Handel, the worst in fact, was the huge success in 1728 of *The Beggar's Opera*, a so-called "ballad opera" by John Gay, with a libretto in English, spoken dialogue in place of recitative, and a score

consisting entirely of popular songs arranged by a German expatriate composer named Johann Pepusch (1667–1752).

This cynical slap in the face of “noble” entertainments like the *seria* had an unprecedented run of sixty-two performances during its first season (for a Handel opera a run of fifteen performances was considered a great success), and, altogether amazingly, was revived every season for the rest of the eighteenth century and beyond. (It has had hit revivals even in the twentieth century and spawned a huge number of spinoffs and adaptations, including some very famous ones like the *Threepenny Opera* of Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill.) On every level from its plot (set among thieves and other London lowlifes) to its “moral” (namely, that morals are sheer hypocrisy) to its musical and dramatic allusions (full of swipes at operatic conventions and lofty “Handelian” style), *The Beggar’s Opera* has been characterized as “frivolously nihilistic.”¹ But it also played into a prejudice that was the very opposite of frivolous or nihilistic—namely, a peculiarly English version of the old prejudice (as old, we may recall, as Plato) against “delicious” music as a corrupting force that was inimical to the public welfare. The “soft and effeminate Musick which abounds in the *Italian Opera*,” wrote the playwright John Dennis (1657–1734), a particularly vociferous London critic, “by soothing the Senses, and making a Man too much in love with himself, makes him too little fond of the Publick; so by emasculating and dissolving the Mind, it shakes the very Foundation of Fortitude, and so is destructive of both Branches of the publick Spirit.”² In an *Essay upon Publick Spirit* published in 1711, the year of Handel’s London debut, Dennis even argued that British wives should keep their men away from the opera lest they become “effeminate” (by which he meant homosexual). And he proceeded to attach this issue to one that mattered in Britain as it mattered at that time nowhere else on earth—the issue of patriotism, and its attendant religious bigotry:

Is there not an implicit Contract between all the People of every Nation, to espouse one another’s Interest against all Foreigners whatsoever? But would not any one swear, to observe the Conduct of [opera lovers], they were protected by *Italians* in their Liberty, their Property, and their Religion against *Britons*? For why else should they prefer *Italian* Sound to *British* Sense, *Italian* Nonsense to *British* Reason, the Blockheads of *Italy* to their own Countrymen, who have Wit; and the Luxury, and Effeminacy of the most profligate Portion of the Globe to *British* Virtue?

One need hardly add that all of these fears and intolerances intersected on the sexually ambiguous figure of the castrato, the very epitome of Italian license and excess, who added insult to injury by commanding princely fees far beyond the earning power of domestic singers. In the same year that Dennis’s essay appeared, Joseph Addison, the eminent satirist, poked malicious fun at the castrati and their fans through an invented character, “Squire *Squeekum*, who by his Voice seems (if I may use the Expression) to be ‘cut out’ for an *Italian* Singer.”³

The Beggar’s Opera gave all of these resentful views a colossal boost. Its success was a presage that the *opera seria*, even Handel’s, could no longer count on the English audience to take it seriously. And indeed, within a decade of its production, both Handel’s own opera company and the Opera of the Nobility had gone bankrupt. Neither Handel nor the castrati were the losers, though. As Christopher Hogwood, a notable performer of Handel’s music and a leader in the revival of an “authentic” period style of presenting it, has shrewdly observed, if *The Beggar’s Opera* was a bad omen it was because it “killed not the Italian opera but the chances of serious English opera”⁴—something that would not emerge until the twentieth century, and then only briefly.

Notes:

- (1) Robert D. Hume, “The Beggar’s Opera,” in *New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, Vol. I (London: Macmillan, 1992), p. 377.
- (2) John Dennis, “An Essay on the Opera’s [sic] after the Italian Manner, Which are about to be Establish’d on the English Stage: With Some Reflections on the Damage Which They May Bring to the Publick” (1706), quoted in Richard Leppert, “Imagery, Musical Confrontation and Cultural Difference in Early 18th-Century London,” *Early Music* XIV (1986): 337.
- (3) *The Spectator*, no. 205 (25 October 1711); quoted in Leppert, “Imagery, Musical Confrontation and Cultural Difference,” p. 331.
- (4) Christopher Hogwood, *Handel* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1984), p. 142.

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Handel: From opera to oratorio

Oratorio

Handel: Oratorios and musical dramas

LOFTY ENTERTAINMENTS

Chapter: CHAPTER 7 Class of 1685 (II)

Source: MUSIC IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

Meanwhile, if Handel was to continue to have a public career in England, it would have to be on a new footing. It would take another kind of lofty entertainment to recapture his old audience. Here is where Handel's unique genius—as much a genius for the main chance as for music—asserted itself. Whenever opera had encountered obstacles on its Italian home turf—for example, those pesky ecclesiastical strictures against operating theaters during Lent—its creative energies had found an outlet in oratorio, especially in Rome, where Handel had served his apprenticeship. Handel had even composed a Roman oratorio himself (*La resurrezione*, 1708) and on a trip back to Germany in George I's retinue he composed a German oratorio on the same Easter subject: *Der für die Sünde der Welt gemartete und sterbende Jesus* (“Jesus, who suffered and died for the sins of the world”), usually called the *Brockes Passion* after the name of the librettist.



fig. 7-4 Handel directing a rehearsal of an oratorio, possibly at the residence of the Prince of Wales.

In fact, Handel had already composed some minor dramatic works on English texts, including *Acis and Galatea* (1718), a mythological masque, and another masque, *Haman and Mordecai* on an Old Testament subject, both commissioned by an English patron, the Duke of Chandos, for performance at his estate, called Cannons. Handel had also enjoyed great success with some English psalm settings he had written on commission from the same patron (now called the Chan-dos Anthems), in which he had drawn on indigenous choral genres for which Purcell had set the most important precedents: anthems and allegorical “odes” to celebrate the feast day of St. Cecilia (music’s patron saint), royal birthdays, and the like.

A pastiche revival of *Haman and Mordecai*, expanded and refurbished (though not by Handel) and retitled *Esther*, was performed in 1732 in the explicit guise of “an oratorio or sacred drama” and attracted so much interest that Handel himself conducted a lucrative performance on the stage of the King’s Theatre, where business that year was otherwise slow. The next year Handel wrote a couple of English oratorios himself (*Deborah*, *Athalia*). As operatic bankruptcy loomed, these experiences gave Handel an idea that the English public might welcome a new style of vernacular oratorio tailored to its tastes and prejudices. The result was *Saul* (1739), a musical theater piece of a wholly novel kind that differed in significant ways from all previous oratorio styles. As a genre born directly out of the vicissitudes of the British entertainment market, the Handelian oratorio was a unique product of its time and place.

How was it new? The traditional Italian oratorio was simply an *opera seria* on a biblical subject, by the early

eighteenth century often performed with action, although this was not always allowed. In England, the acting out of a sacred drama was prohibited by episcopal decree, but *Saul* was still more or less an opera in the sense that its unstaged action proceeded through the same musical structures, its dramatic confrontations being carried out through the customary recitatives and arias, making it easy for the audience to supply in their imagination the implied stage movement (sometimes vivid and violent, as when Saul, enraged, twice throws his spear, although the actual singer of the role makes no move).

The listener's mind's eye was helped in other ways as well. The imaginary action was "opened out" into outdoor mass scenes unthinkable in opera, with opulent masque-like choruses representing the "people of Israel." Among the main advertised attractions, moreover, was an especially lavish orchestra replete with a trombone choir, with evocative carillons, and with virtuoso instrumental solos, as if to compensate for the diminished visual component. All the same, *Saul*—like *Esther* and *Deborah* before it, and *Samson*, *Belshazzar*, *Judas Maccabeus*, *Solomon*, and *Joshua* after it—remained centered in its plot on dramatized human relations, the traditional stuff of opera. It was in a sense the most traditionally operatic of all of Handel's oratorios, since the title character—the melancholy and choleric ruler of Israel, racked by jealousy and superstition—is complex, and the action implies a judgment of his deeds.

The other Old Testament oratorios listed above (excepting only *Belshazzar*) are all tales of civic heroism and national triumph. *Esther*, *Deborah*, *Samson*, *Judah Maccabee*, and *Joshua* were all saviors of their people, the Chosen People. All were heroes through whom the nation, over and over again, proved invincible. (And even *Belshazzar*, while not directly about Israel's heroism, depicts the destruction of Israel's adversary.) Here is where Handel truly showed his mettle in catering to his public, for the English audience—an insular people, an industrious and prosperous people, since the revolutions of the seventeenth century a self-determining people ruled by law, and (as we have seen) a latently chauvinistic people—identified strongly with the Old Testament Israelites and regarded the tales Handel set before them as gratifying allegories of themselves. "What a glorious Spectacle!" wrote one enraptured observer

to see a crowded Audience of the first Quality of a Nation, headed by the Heir apparent of their Sovereign's Crown [the future George III], sitting enchanted at Sounds, that at the same time express'd in so sublime a manner the Praises of the Deity itself, and did such Honour to the Faculties of human Nature, in first *creating* those Sounds, if I may so speak; and in the next Place, being able to be so highly delighted with them. Did such a Taste prevail universally in a People, that People might expect on a like Occasion, if such Occasion should ever happen to them, the same *Deliverance* as those Praises celebrate; and Protestant, free, virtuous, united, Christian England, need little fear, at any time hereafter, the whole Force of slavish, bigotted, united, unchristian Popery, risen up against her, should such a Conjunction ever hereafter happen.⁵

As the historian Ruth Smith has observed, the author of this letter "deploys the analogy of Britain with Israel to present the idea of a unified nation as natural, desirable, and, in the face of foreign aggression, essential," and praises Handel's music as an impetus that "can not only allude to, but actually create, national harmony and strength."⁶ Handel's oratorios, in short, were the first great monuments in the history of European music to nationalism. That was the true source of their novelty, for nationalism was then a novel force in the world.

The letter just quoted, printed in the *London Daily Post* in April 1739, referred to the première performance of *Israel in Egypt*, the next oratorio Handel composed after *Saul*, which transformed the genre yet further away from opera and made it yet more novel and more specific to its time and place. For *Israel in Egypt* almost completely abandons the dramatic format—that is, the representation of human conflicts and confrontations through recitatives and arias—in favor of impersonal biblical narration, much of it carried out by the chorus (i.e., the Nation) directly, often split into two antiphonal choirs as in the Venetian choral concerti of old. It is thus the most monumental work of its kind, and in the specific sense implied by the writer of the letter, which relates to vastness and impressiveness, the most sublime.

This specifically Handelian conception of the oratorio as an essentially choral genre—an invisible pageant, it would be fair to say, rather than an invisible drama—completely transformed the very idea of such a piece. So thoroughly did Handel Handelize the oratorio for posterity that it comes now as a surprise to read contemporary descriptions of his work that emphasize its novelty, indeed its failure to conform to prior expectations. One contemporary listener wrote in some perplexity about Handel's next biblical oratorio after *Israel in Egypt*—namely *Messiah*, now the most famous oratorio in the world and the one to which all others are compared—that "although called an *Oratorio*, yet it is not dramatic but properly a Collection of *Hymns* or *Anthems* drawn from the sacred Scriptures."⁷ That is precisely

what the word “oratorio” has connoted since Handel’s day. Now it is the dramatic oratorio that can seem unusual.

Israel in Egypt, the prototype of the “anthem oratorio,” recounts the story of the Exodus, with a text compiled from scripture by Charles Jennens, a wealthy dilettante who paid Handel for the privilege of collaborating with him, and who had already written the libretto for *Saul*. This new “libretto” was no original creation but a sort of scriptural anthology that mixed narrative from the Book of Exodus with verses from the Book of Psalms. Its first ten vocal numbers (seven of them choruses) collectively narrate the story of the Ten Plagues of Egypt. In musico-dramatic technique they collectively embody a virtual textbook on the state of the “madrigalistic” art—the art of musical depiction—in the early eighteenth century, an art of which Handel, perhaps even outstripping Vivaldi, was past master.

Even the little recitative that introduces the first chorus contains a telling bit of word painting—the dissonant harmony and vocal leap of a tritone illustrating the “rigor” with which the Israelites were made to serve their Egyptian masters (Ex. 7-2a). The fact that these effects of melody and harmony do not exactly coincide with the word they illustrate does not lessen the pointedness of the illustration: the sudden asperities, incongruous with the rest of the music in the recitative, send the listener’s imagination off in search of their justification, which can only be supplied by the appropriate word.

Tenor

B.c.

Now there a - rose a new king ov - er E - gypt, which knew not

Jo - seph; and he set ov - er Is - rael task - mas - ters to af - flict them with

bur - dens; and they made them serve with ri - gour.

ex. 7-2a George Frideric Handel, *Israel in Egypt*, no. 2, recitative, “Now there arose a new king”

The first of the plagues—the bloody river—is a choral fugue (Ex. 7-2b), in which we again encounter some time-honored devices: melodic dissonance in the subject (a diminished seventh) to portray loathing, and a *passus duriusculus* to combine that loathing with the river’s flow as the fugue subject recedes from the foreground to prepare for the answer. The next plague (no. 5, “Their land brought forth frogs”) is set not as a chorus but as an “air”—a truncated aria (very common in Handel’s oratorios) in which the “da capo” is represented by its ritornello alone (Ex. 7-2c). Handel chose to make this number a solo item not only to provide some variety for the listener (and some respite for the choristers) but also because he evidently thought the illustrative idea—leapfrog!—would work better as an instrumental ritornello for two violins than in the voice.

Largo assai

Soprano
Alto
Tenor
Bass

They loath-ed to

They loath-ed to drink of the ri - ver: he turn-ed their wa

5

They loath-ed to

drink of the ri - ver, he turn - ed their wa

ters in-to blood, in -

8

drink of the ri - ver, he turn - ed their wa - ters in-to

- ters in-to blood; they

- to blood; they loath - ed to drink of the ri -

They loath - ed to

11

blood; they loath - ed to drink of the

loath-ed, they loath - ed to drink of the

ver, they loath - ed to drink of the ri-ver.

drink of the ri - ver, he turn-ed their wa

ex. 7-2b George Frideric Handel, *Israel in Egypt*, no. 4, chorus, "They loathed to drink of the river," mm. 1-13

Andante

Vln. I

Vln. II

B.c.

6

ex. 7-2c George Frideric Handel, *Israel in Egypt*, no. 5, aria, “Their land brought forth frogs,” mm. 1–11

The idea of purely instrumental “imitation of nature” was a Vivaldian idea, as we know from the *Four Seasons*, but no other composer had ever taken instrumental imitations to such lengths as Handel resorted to in *Israel in Egypt*—epoch-making lengths, in fact, since the art of “orchestration” as “tone-color composition,” serving expressive or poetic purposes and requiring an extended instrumental “palette,” achieved a new level in Handel’s oratorios, and nowhere more spectacularly than in no. 6, “He spake the word” (Ex. 7-2d). The word here, of course, is the word of God, and so the burnished sound of the trombone choir, associated with regal and spectacular church music since the Gabriellis in Venice at the end of the sixteenth century, was the inevitable choice to echo the choral announcement that God had spoken. Later, the two insects mentioned in the text (flies and locusts) are imitated by string instruments in two sizes. The massed violins are treated especially virtuosically. Demanding of ripienists all a soloist’s skills is another mark of “gourmet” orchestration, marking not only the player but the composer as a virtuoso.

Andante larghetto

Ob. I

Ob. II

Bn.

Trb. I

Trb. II

Trb. III

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Soprano I

Alto I

Tenor I

Bass I

Soprano II

Alto II

Tenor II

Bass II

Org. I

Org. II

He spake the word,

and there came all man-ner of

and there came all man-ner of

He spake the word,

and there came all man-ner of

and there came all man-ner of

He spake the word,

He spake the word,

f

tanto solo

f

tanto solo

f

soli

soli

soli

soli

The image shows a page of a musical score for George Frideric Handel's *Israel in Egypt*, no. 6, chorus, "He spake the word," measures 1-3. The score is arranged in systems. The first system includes Oboe I and II, and Bassoon. The second system includes Trumpet I, II, and III. The third system includes Violin I and II, and Viola. The fourth system includes Soprano I, Alto I, Tenor I, and Bass I. The fifth system includes Soprano II, Alto II, Tenor II, and Bass II. The sixth system includes Organ I and II. The vocal parts (Soprano I, Alto I, Soprano II, Alto II) have lyrics: "flies, all man-ner of". The instrumental parts include various woodwinds and strings. The score is in a key signature of one flat (B-flat) and a common time signature (C).

ex. 7-2d George Frideric Handel, *Israel in Egypt*, no. 6, chorus, "He spake the word," mm. 1-3

The gathering storm leading to the representation of the "hailstones for rain" in no. 7 (Ex. 7-2e) calls a large assortment of new (woodwind and timpani) colors into play. Here Handel had a precedent in the French court opera, where orchestrally magnificent storm scenes had been a stock-in-trade since Marin Marais's *Alcyone* (1706), which spawned a legion of imitators (culminating with a volcanic eruption in Rameau's *Les Indes galantes* of 1735) and which, like many court operas, had been published in full score. No. 8, "He sent a thick darkness" (Ex. 7-2f), introduces a new, unheard-of color—high bassoons doubling low violins, but later descending to their normal range and trilling—as well as softly sustained but very dissonant chromatic harmonies to represent the covering gloom. The huge tutti chords slashing on the strong beats in no. 9 ("He smote all the first-born of Egypt") make almost palpable the grisliest calamity of all (Ex. 7-2g).

Yet no matter how lofty or how grisly the theme, Handel's representation of the plagues remains an entertainment—an entertainment that an exhaustive description like the one offered here threatens to impair. It has indeed been a tiresome exercise, and apologies are offered to those rightly exasperated by it, for tediously cataloguing the means by which such vivid effects are achieved has the same dampening effect as does the explanation of a joke.

But although the dampening may dull the joke, it may also serve a good purpose if it forces us to realize and confront, through our annoyance, what might be otherwise overlooked or forgotten—that these marvelous and

musically epochal illustrations are indeed, for the most part, no more (and no less) than jokes. Like all “madrigalisms,” they depend on mechanisms of humor: puns (plays on similarities of sound), wit (apt conjunctions of incongruous things), caricature (deliberate exaggerations that underscore a similarity). And, as Handel knew very well, audiences react to such effects, despite the awfulness of the theme, as they do to comedy. We giggle in appreciation when we “get” the representation of the leaping frogs and the buzzing flies, and we guffaw when the latter give way to the thundering locusts.

But what of the smiting of all those Egyptian boys? Do we laugh at that, too? We do—or, at least, so the music directs us—just as we have laughed at crop failures, bloody rivers, “blotches and blains.” The withholding of empathy for the Egyptians is an essential part of the biblical account of the Exodus, and the scorn of the biblical Israelites and their religious descendants for the ancient oppressor is what enables the success of Handel’s strategy. This separation of self and other plays also into the ideology of nationalism; a great deal of English national pride (or any nation’s national pride) depends on a perception of separateness from other nations, and superiority to them. Of all of Handel’s oratorios, it is perhaps easiest to see in *Israel in Egypt* how the manifest religious content coexists with, enables, and is ultimately subordinate to the nationalistic subtext. Hence the essential secularism of its impulse and its enduring appeal.

Notes:

(5) “R. W.,” letter to the *London Daily Post*, 18 April 1739; Otto Eric Deutsch, *Handel: A Documentary Biography* (London: A. & C. Black, 1955), pp. 544–45.

(6) Ruth Smith, *Handel’s Oratorios and Eighteenth-Century Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 288–89.

(7) John Brown, *A Dissertation on the Rise, Union, and Power, the Progressions, Separations, and Corruptions, of Poetry and Music* (London: L. Davis and C. Reymers, 1763), p. 218; quoted in Howard E. Smither, *A History of the Oratorio*, Vol. II (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1977), p. 255.

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George Frideric Handel

Handel: Oratorios and musical dramas

MESSIAH

Chapter: CHAPTER 7 Class of 1685 (II)

Source: MUSIC IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

The image displays a page of a musical score for George Frideric Handel's Messiah. The score is arranged in a standard orchestral format with vocal parts. The instruments listed on the left are:

- Oboe I (Ob. I)
- Oboe II (Ob. II)
- Bassoon I-II (Bn. I-II)
- Trumpet I (Tpc. I)
- Trumpet II (Tpc. II)
- Trombone I (Tbn. I)
- Trombone II (Tbn. II)
- Trombone III (Tbn. III)
- Timpani (Timp.)
- Violin I (Vln. I)
- Violin II (Vln. II)
- Viola (Vla.)
- Soprano I (Soprano I)
- Alto I (Alto I)
- Tenore I (Tenore I)
- Basso I (Basso I)
- Soprano II (Soprano II)
- Alto II (Alto II)
- Tenore II (Tenore II)
- Basso II (Basso II)
- Cello (Ccl.)
- Organ I-II (Org. I-II)

The vocal parts (Soprano I, Alto I, Tenore I, Basso I, Soprano II, Alto II, Tenore II, Basso II) are singing the lyrics: "He gave them hail stones for rain;". The lyrics are written below the vocal staves. The instrumental parts are written on staves with various clefs and time signatures. The score is presented in a clear, black-and-white format.

The image displays a page of a musical score for the chorus "He gave them hailstones" from George Frideric Handel's *Messiah*. The score is arranged in two systems. The first system includes the woodwinds (Ob. I & II, Bsn. I-II, Tpc. I & II, Trb. I, II, & III, and Timp.), strings (Vln. I & II, Vla.), and vocal soloists (Soprano I, Alto I, Tenor I, Bass I). The second system includes Soprano II, Alto II, Tenor II, Bass II, a Cello (C.), and Oboe 4-II. The vocal parts have lyrics: "fire, mingled with the hail - stones for rain;". The instrumental parts feature rhythmic patterns, including sixteenth-note runs in the strings and woodwinds.

ex. 7-2e George Frideric Handel, *Israel in Egypt*, no. 7, chorus, "He gave them hailstones," mm. 22–26

Largo

Flu. I
Flu. II
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Soprano I, II
Alto I, II
Tenor I, II
Bass I, II
C.

He sent a thick dark-ness o-ver all the land, o-ver
He sent a thick dark-ness o-ver all the land, o-ver
He sent a thick dark-ness o-ver all the land, o-ver
He sent a thick dark-ness o-ver all the land, o-ver

ex. 7-2f George Frideric Handel, *Israel in Egypt*, no. 8, chorus,
“He sent a thick darkness,” mm. 1–13

A tempo giusto e staccato

Ob. I

Ob. II

Bn. I

Bn. II

Trb. I

Trb. II

Trb. III

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Soprano I, II

Alto I, II

Tenor I, II

Bass I, II

B.c.

He smote all the first-born of E - gypt, the chief of all their

The chief of all their

ex. 7-2g George Frideric Handel, *Israel in Egypt*, no. 9, chorus, “He smote all the first-born of Egypt,” mm. 1–4

This applies even to *Messiah* (1741), the one Handel oratorio that was performed within the composer’s lifetime in consecrated buildings and could count, therefore, as a religious observance. The work, or excerpts from it, is still regularly performed in churches, Anglican and otherwise, especially at Christmas time (although its original performances took place at the more traditional Eastertide). But it is much more often performed in concert halls by secular choral societies. That is appropriate, since, like the rest of Handel’s oratorios, *Messiah*’s true affinities remain thoroughly theatrical.

What distinguished it from its fellows and gave rise to its occasional special treatment was its subject matter. Practically alone among Handel’s English oratorios, it has a New Testament subject and a text, again compiled by Jennens, drawn largely from the Gospels. That subject, the life of Christ the Redeemer with emphasis first on the portents surrounding his birth, and then on his death and resurrection, brings the work into line with the most traditional ecclesiastical oratorios, and with the even older tradition of narrative Passion settings.

Messiah may have been commissioned by the Lord Lieutenant of Dublin to raise money for the city’s charities. Handel wrote the music with his usual legendary speed—in twenty-four days, from 22 August to 14 September

1741—and finished the orchestral score on 29 October, setting out for Dublin two days later. The first performance took place at the New Music Hall on Fishamble Street on 13 April 1742.

The première performance of *Messiah* is an especially important date in the history of European music because Handel's atypical New Testament oratorio is the very oldest work in the literature to have remained steadily in active repertory ever since its first performance. Unlike any other music so far mentioned or examined in this book, with the single equivocal exception of Gregorian chant—and even the chant lost its canonical status at the Second Vatican Council in 1963—*Messiah* has never had to be rediscovered or “revived,” except in the sense the word is used in the theater, whereby any performance by a cast other than the original one is termed a revival. The continuous performing tradition of European art (or literate) music—which we can now (and for this very reason) fairly call “classical music”—can therefore be said to begin with *Messiah*, the first “classic” in our contemporary repertoire, and Handel is therefore the earliest of all “perpetually-in-repertory” (“classical”) composers.

Handel himself conducted yearly London “revivals” of *Messiah*, beginning the next year at the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden. The work became a perennial and indispensable favorite with the London public when Handel began giving charity performances of it in the chapel of the London Foundling Hospital, starting in 1750. These were the “consecrated” performances that led to the work's being regarded as an actual “sacred oratorio,” although that was not the composer's original intention. By the time of Handel's death on 14 April 1759 (nine days after conducting his last Foundling Hospital *Messiah*), the British institution of choral festivals had been established, and these great national singing orgies (particularly the Three Choirs Festival, which has continued into our own day) have maintained *Messiah* as a unique national institution, vouchsafing the unprecedented continuity of its performance tradition (although the style of its performances has continued to evolve over the years, in accord with changing tastes—another sign of a “classic”).



fig. 7-5 Chapel at the Foundling Hospital, Dublin, where *Messiah* was first performed.

By the end of the eighteenth century *Messiah* was accepted and revered as true cathedral music. It is all the more illuminating, therefore, to emphasize and demonstrate its secular and theatrical side. This aspect of the work can be vividly illustrated both from its fascinatingly enigmatic creative history and from its performance history.

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Handel: Borrowing

Gaetano Guadagni

“BORROWING”

Chapter: CHAPTER 7 Class of 1685 (II)

Source: MUSIC IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

In order to compose at the kind of speed required by the conditions under which they worked, seventeenth- and eighteenth-century composers frequently resorted to what have come to be called “parody” techniques—that is, to the reuse or recycling of older compositions in newer ones. Every church and theater composer indulged in the practice. There was really no choice. The only question involved the nature of the sources plundered and the specific means or methods employed. Was it only a process of “cannibalization”—eating one’s own young (adapting one’s own works)—or did it involve what would now be regarded as plagiarism? And if the latter, did the practice carry the ethical stigma now attached to plagiarism—or, for that matter, any stigma at all?

The question comes up with particular inevitability in connection with Handel, since he seems to have been the champion of all parodists, adapting both his own works and those of other composers in unprecedented numbers and with unprecedented exactness. Indeed, ever since the appearance in 1906 of a book (by one Sedley Taylor) entitled *The Indebtedness of Handel to Works by Other Composers*, the matter has been a cause for inescapable concern on the part of the composer’s admirers, and a whole literature on the subject has sprouted up—two literatures, in fact: one in prosecution of the case, the other in Handel’s defense.

The prosecutors have built an astonishing record. Several of Handel’s works consist largely—in extreme cases, almost entirely—of systematic “borrowings,” as they are euphemistically called. *Israel in Egypt* is among them. Of its twenty-eight choruses, eleven were based on pieces by other composers, some of them practically gobbled up whole. Three of the plagues choruses—including “He Spake the Word” and “He gave them hailstones,” both singled out for their epoch-making orchestration—were based on a single cantata (or more precisely a *serenata*, music for an outdoor evening entertainment) by Alessandro Stradella (1639–82), a Roman composer whose music Handel encountered during his prentice years. Compare, for example, Ex. 7-3 with Ex. 7-2d.

Other famous cases detailed by Taylor include a setting of John Dryden’s classic *Ode for St. Cecilia’s Day*, performed in 1739, the same year as *Israel in Egypt*, based practically throughout on themes and passages appropriated from a then brand-new book of harpsichord suites (*Componimenti musicali*) by the Viennese organist Gottlieb Muffat. More recently it has been discovered that no fewer than seven major works composed between 1733 and 1738 draw extensively on the scores of three old operas by Alessandro Scarlatti that Handel had borrowed from Jennens. Perhaps Handel’s most brazen appropriation involved the “Grand Concertos” (*concerti grossi*), op. 6, familiar to us from chapter 5. They were composed in September and October of 1739 and rely heavily for thematic ideas on harpsichord compositions by Domenico Scarlatti, a fellow member of the Class of 1685, which had been published in London the year before.

Noticing how many of Handel’s “borrowings” involved works from the 1730s, and particularly the exceptionally busy years 1737–39, some historians have tried to connect his reliance on the music of other composers with a stroke suffered in the spring of 1737, brought on by overwork, that temporarily paralyzed Handel’s right hand and kept him from his normal labors. Whether as evidence of generally deteriorated health or as a reason for especially hurried work following his enforced idleness, the stroke has been offered as an extenuating circumstance by some who have sought to defend Handel from the charge of plagiarism.

ex. 7-3 Alessandro Stradella, *Qual prodigio e ch'io miri*, plundered for *Israel in Egypt*

Stronger defenders have impugned the whole issue as anachronistic. To accuse Handel or any contemporary of his of plagiarism, they argue, is to invoke the Romantic notion of “original genius” at a time when “borrowing, particularly of individual ideas, was a common practice to which no one took exception” (as John H. Roberts, one of Handel’s ablest “prosecutors,” has stated the case for the defense).⁸ Going even further, some of Handel’s defenders have claimed his “borrowing” to have been in its way a good deed. “If he borrowed,” wrote Donald Jay Grout (paraphrasing Handel’s contemporary Johann Mattheson), “he more often than not repaid with interest, clothing the borrowed material with new beauty and preserving it for generations that otherwise would scarcely have known of its existence.”⁹

The philosopher Peter Kivy, in a general discussion of musical representation, once cited a piquant example of such “improvement”: a bit of neutral harpsichord figuration from one of Muffat’s suites that Handel transformed into an especially witty “madrigalism” by summoning it to illustrate Dryden’s description, in the *Ode for St Cecilia’s Day*, of the cosmic elements—earth, air, fire, and water—leaping to attention at Music’s command (Ex. 7-4).¹⁰ And surely no one comparing the choruses in Ex. 7-2 with their models in Stradella can fail to notice that everything that makes the *Israel in Egypt* choruses noteworthy in historical retrospect—the lofty trombone chords, the insect imitations, the

storm music—came from Handel, not his victim.

Historical distance affects the case in other ways as well: Handel and his quarries being equally dead, it may no longer be of any particular ethical or even esthetic import to us whether Handel actually thought up the themes for which posterity has given him credit. (Nor could he, or any other composer of his day, have had an inkling of the eventual interest posterity would take in his reworkings.) Indeed, comparing Handel's dazzling reworkings with their often rather undistinguished originals can even cast some doubt on the importance of *inventio* (as Handel's contemporaries called facility in the sheer dreaming up of themes) in the scheme of musical values, and cause us to wonder whether that is where true "originality" resides.

Muffat, *Componimenti Musicali*, Suite IV

Clavier

ex. 7-4a Gottlieb Muffat, *Componimenti musicali*, Suite no. 4

And yet it does considerably affect our view of Handel and his times to know that recent scholarship, and particularly John Roberts's investigations, have pretty well demolished the foundations of the old "defense." Roberts has shown that what we call plagiarism was so regarded in Handel's day as well; that, while widespread, "it frequently drew sharp censure"¹¹; and that Handel was often the target of rebuke. One of his critics, ironically enough, was Johann Mattheson, so often cited in Handel's defense, who openly and angrily accused Handel of copping a melody from one of his operas. Another was Jennens, of all people, who wrote to a friend (in a letter of 1743 that came to light only in 1973) that he had just received a shipment of music from Italy, and that "Handel has borrow'd a dozen of the Pieces & I dare say I shall catch him stealing from them; as I have formerly, both from Scarlatti & Vinci."¹²

We know from chapter 4 that Leonardo Vinci, unlike Alessandro Scarlatti, was a contemporary and a rival of Handel's. Handel "borrowed" from Vinci as a way of making his style more up-to-date, which is to say more profitable. This begins to sound like a familiar plagiarist's motive for "borrowing," and Roberts has discovered a unique case where Handel both borrowed from a Vinci score (*Didone abbandonata*, first performed in 1726) and "pasted" it as well—that is, arranged it for performance in London under its original composer's name. Sure enough, Handel rewrote the passages he had borrowed for his own recent operas so as to obscure his indebtedness to Vinci's.

Violin I, II

Tenor Solo

Continuo

Then cold and hot, and moist and dry, in

or - der to - their sta - tions leap,

The image displays a musical score for three parts: Violin I, II; Tenor Solo; and Continuo. The music is in G major (one sharp) and common time. The Tenor Solo part includes the lyrics: "Then cold and hot, and moist and dry, in or - der to - their sta - tions leap,". The score shows the beginning of a section with various musical notations including rests, eighth notes, and trills.

ex. 7-4b George Frideric Handel, *Ode for St. Cecilia's Day*

If the old defense—that borrowing carried no stigma—were correct, there would have been no reason for Handel to cover his tracks. And that may also explain why, of all the borrowings securely imputed to him, Handel altered the ones he made from Domenico Scarlatti the most. It may well have been because, of all the music he borrowed, Scarlatti's keyboard pieces were most likely to be recognized by the members of his own public.

In the case of *Messiah*, Handel's known borrowings were of the "cannibalistic" kind—the kind that even now entails little or no disrepute. Self-borrowings, which do not raise any question of ownership, can be called borrowing without euphemism. They are generally regarded, even in the strictest accounting, as a legitimate way for a busy professional to economize on time and labor. And yet they, too, can be revealing in what they tell us about Handel's (and his audience's) sense of what was fitting—in a word, about their taste.

Several of the most famous choruses in *Messiah* are of an airy, buoyant, affable type that contrasts most curiously with the "sublime" and monumental style of *Israel in Egypt*. Ornately melismatic, they require a kind of fast and florid, almost athletic singing that is quite unusual in choruses, and they sport an unusually light, transparent contrapuntal texture, in which the full four-voice choral complement is reserved for climaxes and conclusions only. Their virtuosity and their trim shapeliness of form are completely unlike anything one finds in the actual sacred

choral music of the day—that is, music meant for performance in church, whether by Handel (who, never having an ecclesiastical patron, wrote very little) or by anyone else.

They are, however, utterly in the spirit of latter-day “madrigalian” genres—genres based on Italian love poetry—such as the chamber cantata pioneered by Carissimi and Alessandro Scarlatti (a genre in which Handel especially excelled during his Italian apprenticeship), and related breeds like the serenata or the *duetto per camera*.

The last-named (the “chamber duet” as it is sometimes called, rather stiltedly, in English) was simply a cantata for two voices. It became popular enough by A. Scarlatti’s time to be regarded as a separate genre—replete with specialist composers, like Agostino Steffani (1654–1728)—partly because in matters of love, two, as they say, is company. Of all the postmadrigalian genres, the duetto was likeliest to be explicitly pagan and erotic. A typical text for such a piece might address or reproach Eros (Cupid) himself, the fickle god of amorous desire:

<i>No, di voi non vo' fidarmi,</i>	No, I do not wish to trust you,
<i>cieco Amor, crudel Beltà!</i>	blind Cupid, cruel Beauty!
<i>Troppo siete menzognere,</i>	You are too wily,
<i>lusinghiere Deità!</i>	O flattering deities!
<i>Altra volta incatenarmi</i>	Another time you did manage
<i>già poteste il fido cor;</i>	to net my trustful heart;
<i>So per prova i vostri inganni:</i>	so from having experienced your tricks
<i>due tiranni siete ognor.</i>	I know you both for tyrants.

These are the words of a duetto by Handel himself, and as a glance at Ex. 7-5a will show, he wove his paired vocal lines into garlands that wrap around one another to illustrate the “netting” to which the text refers (and behind that, of course, the physical writhing for which the textual words are a metaphor). Should it surprise or dismay us to discover that this erotic duet became the basis for not one but two choruses in *Messiah*? Handel reworked the opening section into “For unto us a Child is born” (no. 12, Ex. 7-5b) and the closing section (not shown) into “All we like sheep have gone astray” (no. 26).

Andante

Soprano (S):

Nò, di voi non vo' fi - dar - mi, cie - co A - mor, cru - del bel -
 tà! cie - co A - mor, cru - del bel - tà!
 Nò, di voi non vo' fi - dar - mi, cie - co A -
 mor, cru - del bel - tà! cie - co A -

Piano (P):

Right Hand (RH):

Left Hand (LH):

mi, nò, di
 mor, cru - del bel - tà! Nò,

voi non vo' fi - dar - mi, cie - co A -
 nò, di voi non vo' fi - dar

mor, cru - del bel - tà, cie - co A -

mor, cru - del bel -

ex. 7-5a George Frideric Handel, duetto, *No, di voi non vo' fidarmi*

Andante allegro

Vln I
Ob. I

Vln II
Ob. II

Vla.

Har.

con bn.

con rip.

mf

con bn.

p

S. - tutti

For un-to us a Child is born, ... un-to us a Son is

10

giv-en, un-to us a Son is giv-en. T. - tutti For un-to

13

for un-to us a Child is born, us a Child is born, un-to

ex. 7-5b *Messiah*, no. 12 (“For unto us a child is born”), mm. 1–14

In fashioning the chorus shown in Ex. 7-5b, Handel tossed the duet material as a unit between the high male/female pair (sopranos and tenors) and the low one (altos and basses). Only once, briefly, near the end, does Handel amplify the duet writing into a quartet by doubling both lines at consonant intervals. Elsewhere the choral tutti consists of a chordal outburst (“Wonderful Counsellor!”) that is newly composed for *Messiah* and caps every section of the chorus with a climax. In “All we like sheep,” we have another case where one of Handel’s happiest descriptive ideas (the wayward lines at “gone astray”) turns out to have been not composed but merely adapted to the words it so aptly illustrates.

The use of such material as the basis for an oratorio on the life of Christ has tended to bemuse those for whom the sacred and the secular are mutually exclusive spheres. One way of excusing the apparent blasphemy has been to declare that the *duetti*, composed during the summer of 1741, were actually sketches for *Messiah*, composed that fall, and that therefore the text was merely a matter of convenience—“little more than a jingle, words of no significance whatever, serving merely as a crystallizing agent for music which was later to be adapted to a text that had not even yet been chosen,” according to one squeamish specialist.¹³ Another writer, the influential nineteenth-century formalist critic Eduard Hanslick, used the apparent incongruity to argue that the expressive content of music was unreal, and that any music could plausibly go with any text!

These circumlocutions are easily refuted, for the esthetic discomfort that gave rise to them was not Handel's. It is obvious, for one thing, that the main melody of "For unto us a Child is born" was modeled carefully on the Italian text, simply because the very first word of the English text is quite incorrectly set. (Say the first line to yourself and see if you place an accent on "for.") But then, the texts (and, consequently the music) of the duetti will seem incongruous, something to be explained away, only if we regard *Messiah* as being church music, which it was not. Despite its embodying the sacredest of themes, it was an entertainment, and its music was designed to amuse a public in search of diversion, however edifying. The musical qualities of the duets, being delightful in themselves, could retain their allure in the new context and adorn the new text—and even, thanks to Handel's "madrigalistic" genius, appear to illuminate its meaning.

The character of the entertainment *Messiah* provided—in particular, the absence of any contradiction between the oratorio's means and aims and those of the secular shows with which it originally competed—is also clarified by its performance history. The aria "But who may abide the day of His coming?" (no. 6) was originally assigned to the bass soloist, and like many oratorio arias, was cast in a direct and simple two-part form that harked back to the earlier style of Alessandro Scarlatti. The Scarlattian resonance is especially marked in this aria (Ex. 7-6a) because of its slowish (*larghetto*) gigue-like meter and its rocking *siciliana* rhythms, relieved only by some fairly perfunctory coloratura writing on the word "fire."

In 1750, Handel replaced the bass aria with a new one for alto that retained the original beginning, but regarded the two halves of the text as embodying a madrigalian antithesis, requiring a wholly contrasting setting for the part that compares God to "a refiner's fire." Here the music suddenly tears into a duple-metered section marked *Prestissimo*, the fastest tempo Handel ever specified, heralded by string tremolos and reaching a fever pitch of vocal virtuosity. A return to the *larghetto* seems to mark the piece as an operatic *da capo* aria, but a second *prestissimo*, even wilder than the first, turns it into something quite unique in both form and impact (Ex. 7-6b).

One way of explaining the replacement is to regard the first version as unsatisfactory and the alteration as an implicit critique, motivated by sheer artistic idealism. In this variant, Handel, on mature reflection, decided that the aria demanded the change of range and character, and then went looking for the proper singer to perform it. If that is what happened, it was a unique occurrence in the career of a theatrical professional who always had to know exactly for whom he was writing in order to maximize his, and his singers', potential effect.

Andante larghetto

Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Bass
Cello
Bass

7
13

But who may a - bide the day of His com - ing.
Doch wer kann be - stehen am Tag sei - ner An - kunft.

p

ex. 7-6a *Messiah*, no. 6 (“But who may abide”), 1741 version, mm.

1–18

For He is like a re -

This system contains the first system of a musical score. It features a grand staff with two piano parts (treble and bass clefs) and a vocal line. The piano parts consist of continuous sixteenth-note patterns. The vocal line has lyrics: "For He is like a re -".

fi (fr) (fr)

This system continues the musical score. It includes piano parts and a vocal line with lyrics: "fi (fr) (fr)". The piano parts have a dynamic marking of *p* (piano).

ner's fire, Adagio for He is

This system concludes the musical score. It includes piano parts and a vocal line with lyrics: "ner's fire, Adagio for He is". The tempo marking *Adagio* is present above the vocal line.

Prestissimo

f

like a re - fi - ner's fire.

con bn.

ex. 7-6b *Messiah*, no. 6 (“But who may abide”), 1750 version, m. 139–end

In the case of “But who may abide,” he knew, and we know, for whom the new aria was intended: the alto castrato Gaetano Guadagni (1729–92), one of the great singers of the eighteenth century, who was then near the beginning of his career, and who had just come to England with a touring troupe of comic singers. Guadagni’s virtuosity, his histrionic powers, and his ability to improvise dazzling cadenzas had taken London by storm. Handel rushed to capitalize on his drawing power, transferring to him all the alto arias in *Samson* (his latest oratorio) and the perennial *Messiah*, and specially composing for Guadagni, in the form of the revised “But who may abide,” what his oratorios otherwise lacked: a true virtuoso showpiece for a castrato singer. “But who may abide” was the obvious candidate for this operation, since its “fire” motif gave Handel the opportunity to revert to his old operatic self and compose a simile aria in the old “rage” or “vengeance” mode typified by “Vivi, tiranno!” (Ex. 7-1).

It has been the great showstopper in *Messiah* ever since. And it all at once erased the distinction between Italianate sissification and manly British dignity that the institution of the English oratorio was supposed to bolster. For here a symbol of “Italian-Continental degradation,”¹⁴ as the cultural historian Richard Leppert puts it (or what Lord Chesterfield, in his famous “Letters to His Son,” would call “that foul sink of illiberal vices and manners”¹⁵), was holding forth in the very midst of what had even by then become an official emblem of proud British piety.

Handel must have loved the moment. He was getting his own back in many ways. By hiring the latest divine

“ragazzo” or Italian boy, he was getting his own back against Farinelli, who had so disastrously snubbed him. By scoring such a hit with his new *aria di bravura* he was vindicating the exotic entertainments he had been forced so long ago to give up. And by making the British public love the infusion of Italian manners into the quintessential British spectacle (for the original “Who May Abide” was never revived, although the British have often rather incongruously tried to give the florid alto version back to the cumbrous bass), he may have been taking a sweetly secret personal revenge on the stolid tastemakers who had forced him to deny his predilections in more ways than one—for as many scholars now agree, Handel, a lifelong bachelor, was probably what we would now call a closeted gay man.

But what chiefly mattered was the success. Again the old theatrical entrepreneur had seized the main chance. His protean nature, his uncanny ability continually to remake himself and his works in response to the conditions and the opportunities that confronted him—that was Handel’s great distinguishing trait. It marks him as perhaps the first modern composer: the prototype of the consumer-conscious artist, a great freelancer in the age of patronage, who managed to succeed—where, two generations later, Mozart would still fail—in living off his pen, and living well.

Notes:

(8) John Roberts, “Handel and Vinci’s ‘Didone Abbandonata’: Revisions and Borrowings,” *Music & Letters* LXVIII (1987): 149.

(9) Donald Jay Grout, *A History of Western Music* (New York: Norton, 1960), p. 410.

(10) Peter Kivy, *Sound and Semblance: Reflections on Musical Representation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), pp. 210–11.

(11) Roberts, “Handel and Vinci’s ‘Didone Abbandonata,’” p. 149.

(12) Quoted in John Roberts, “Handel and Charles Jennen’s Italian Opera Manuscripts,” in *Music and Theatre: Essays in Honour of Winton Dean*, ed. Nigel Fortune (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 192.

(13) Jens Peter Larsen, *Handel’s Messiah* (2nd ed., New York: Norton, 1972), p. 83.

(14) Leppert, “Imagery, Musical Confrontation and Cultural Difference,” p. 331.

(15) S. L. Gulich, ed., *Some Unpublished Letters of Lord Chesterfield* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1937), p. 78.

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Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

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Johann Sebastian Bach

Erdmann Neumeister

Cantata

BACK TO BACH: THE CANTATAS

Chapter: CHAPTER 7 Class of 1685 (II)

Source: MUSIC IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

Turning back now to Bach, and to his very different world, we are ready to assess the music he and his coreligionists unanimously regarded as his major contribution. That music is his vocal music, composed to a large extent in forms familiar to us from our acquaintance with Handel's operas and oratorios, but serving an entirely different audience and an entirely different purpose. With only the most negligible exceptions (birthday odes and the like) chiefly arising out of his Collegium Musicum activities or his nominal role as civic music director, Bach's vocal music is actual church music.

We have seen in the previous chapters how even in his eminently enjoyable instrumental secular music, and in his sometimes monumentally thrilling keyboard music, Bach managed to insinuate an attitude of religious contempt for the world, the polar antithesis to Handel's posture of joyous acceptance and enterprising accommodation. In his overtly religious vocal music we shall of course encounter that attitude in a far more explicit guise, even though it was often communicated through the outward forms of secular entertainment.

By the time of Bach's Leipzig tenure even the music of the Lutheran church had made an accommodation with the music of the popular theater, and this new style of theatricalized music became Bach's medium. Even though he never wrote an opera and maintained a lifelong disdain of what he called "the pretty little Dresden tunes" (Dresden being the nearest city with an opera theater, which Bach occasionally visited), Bach became a master of operatic forms and devices. But he managed—utterly, profoundly, hair-raisingly—to subvert them.



fig. 7-6 Erdmann Neumeister, the German religious poet who adapted the forms of Italian opera to the requirements of Lutheran church services.

The forms of opera came to Lutheran music through the work of Bach's older contemporary Erdmann Neumeister (1671–1756), a German poet and theologian, who revolutionized the form and style of Lutheran sacred texts for music. Traditionally, Lutheran church music, even at its most elaborate, had been based on chorales. By the 1680s a Lutheran “oratorio” style had been developed, in which chorales alternated with biblical verses and—the new ingredient—with little poems that reflected emotionally on the verses the way arias reflected on the action in an *opera seria*. This style was used especially for Passion music at Eastertime. Bach would write Passion cycles of this kind as well, more elaborate ones that reflected some of Neumeister's innovations. In his early years (up to his stint at Weimar), Bach also wrote shorter sacred works in the traditional style, closely based on chorales and biblical texts.

Around the turn of the century, Neumeister began publishing little oratorio texts in a new style, for which he borrowed the name of the Italian genre that had inspired him. Consisting entirely of vividly picturesque, “madrigalesque” verses, and explicitly divided into recitatives and arias, they were dubbed “cantatas” by their author, and they provided the prototype for hundreds of church compositions by Bach (who, however, continued to designate such pieces with mixed voices and instruments as “concertos,” retaining the term in use since the time of Schütz and the latter's teacher, Gabrieli).

ex. 7-7b Chorale: Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland

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J.S. Bach: Cantatas

Chorale settings

THE OLD STYLE

Chapter: CHAPTER 7 Class of 1685 (II)

Source: MUSIC IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

For its chorale-concerto counterpart, Cantata BWV 4, one of Bach's earliest surviving cantatas but also one of the best known, would make an appropriate choice. First performed at Muhlhausen—possibly on Easter Sunday (24 April) 1707 as part of Bach's application for the organist's post there—it consists of a set of variations on another venerable chorale, *Christ lag in Todesbanden* ("Christ lay enchained by death"), which Luther had adapted from the Gregorian Easter sequence *Victimae paschali laudes*.

The text of Cantata no. 4 is exactly that of the chorale, its seven sections corresponding to the seven verses of the hymn, with a diminutive *sinfonia* introducing the first verse. That first verse setting is almost as long as the rest of the cantata put together. The *sinfonia* (Ex. 7-8a), which serves a kind of "preluding" function, is cleverly constructed out of materials from the chorale melody. The first line of the tune is quoted by the first violin in mm. 5–7; the second line, minus its cadential notes, is played by the second violin in mm. 8–10; the expected cadence is finally made by the first violins at the end. The first four measures are built on a neighbor-note motif derived from the melody's incipit (first in the continuo, then in the first violins). The obsessive repetitions, a seeming stutter before the first line of the tune is allowed to progress, effectively suggest constraint—"death's bondage."

The elaborate first chorus is an old-fashioned cantus-firmus composition in "motet style," in which the successive lines of the unadorned chorale tune in the soprano are pitted against points of imitation (some of them "Vorimitationen," pre-echoes of the next line) in the accompanying voices. Although adapted here to a more modern harmonic idiom, and further complicated by the intensely motivic instrumental figuration (often drawn from the neighbor-note incipit), the procedure dates back in its essentials to the sixteenth century. By 1707 such a piece would have been considered entirely *passé* (or at best an exercise in *stile antico*) in any repertory but the Lutheran. For the final *Hallelujah!*, Bach livens things up by doubling the tempo and shifting over to an integrated motet style in which the soprano part moves at the same healthy speed as the rest of the choir. Still, the whole piece, like the church whose worship it adorned, fairly proclaims its allegiance to old ways.

Sinfonia

The image shows the Sinfonia section of J.S. Bach's 'Christ lag in Todesbanden'. It consists of five staves: Violin I, Violin II, Viola I, Viola II, and Continuo. The music is in G major and common time. The Sinfonia is a simple, homophonic setting of the chorale melody.

“Christ lag in Todesbanden”

The image shows the first vocal entry of the chorale. It features a Soprano line with the lyrics “Christ lag in Todesbanden” and an Alto line with the lyrics “für unsrer Sünd ge-”. The instrumental accompaniment includes Violin I, Violin II, Viola I, Viola II, and Continuo. The music is in G major and common time.

“ge-ge - ben”

The image shows the second vocal entry of the chorale. It features a Soprano line with the lyrics “ge-ge - ben” and an Alto line with the lyrics “ge-ge - ben”. The instrumental accompaniment includes Violin I, Violin II, Viola I, Viola II, and Continuo. The music is in G major and common time.

ex. 7-8a J. S. Bach, *Christ lag in Todesbanden*, BWV 4, Sinfonia

And so does verse 2 (Ex. 7-8b), in which a somewhat “figural” version of the chorale melody in the soprano is shadowed by a somewhat freer alto counterpart, while the two sung parts are set over a ground bass the likes of which we have not seen, so to speak, since the middle of the seventeenth century. The style of verse 3, with its neatly layered counterpoint, is like that of an organ chorale prelude: the tenor sings the cantus firmus in the “left hand,” while the massed violins play something like a ritornello in the “right hand,” and the frequently cadencing continuo supplies the “pedal.” Verse 4 is perhaps the most old-fashioned setting of all. It is another cantus-firmus setting (tune in the alto) against motetlike imitations, with a very lengthy *Vorimitation* at the beginning that takes in two lines of the chorale. The continuo is of the *basso seguente* variety, following (in somewhat simplified form) the lowest sung voice whichever it may be, never asserting an independent melodic function of its own. This usage corresponds to the very earliest venetian continuo parts, circa 1600. Like the earliest Venetian “ecclesiastical concertos,” this verse could be sung *a cappella* without significant textural or harmonic loss. It is, in short, a bona fide example of *stile antico*.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla. I

Vla. II

Bass

B.c.

Hier ist das rech - te O - ster -

lamm, das rech - te O - ster - lamm,

ex. 7-8c J. S. Bach, *Christ lag in Todesbanden*, BWV 4, Verse V, mm. 1–12

In verse 6, Bach expands the scope of his imagery to incorporate, possibly for the first time in his music, the characteristic regal rhythms of the French overture as a way of reflecting the meaning of *So feiern wir* (“So mark we now the occasion”), which connotes an air of great solemnity and ceremony (Ex. 7-8e). Later, when the singers break into “rejoicing” triplets, the dotted continuo rhythms are probably meant to align with them. (There was no way of indicating an uneven rhythm within a triplet division in Bach’s notational practice.)

The final verse (composed later for Leipzig, probably replacing a *da capo* repeat of the opening chorus) is set as a *Cantionalsatz*, or “hymnbook setting,” the kind of simple “Bach chorale” harmonization one finds in books meant for congregational singing. (The term was actually coined in 1925 by the musicologist Friedrich Blume, but it filled an annoying terminological gap and has been widely adopted.) Bach ended many cantatas with such settings (enough so that his son Carl Philipp Emanuel could publish a famous posthumous collection of 371 of them), and it is possible that the congregation was invited to join in. We do not know this for a fact, but it does make sense in terms of Leipzig practice as Bach once listed it, where “alternate preluding and singing of chorales” by the congregation customarily followed the performance of the “composition.”

Vln. I
 Vln. II
 Vla. I
 Vla. II
 Bass
 B.c.

dem To - de für,
 der Wü - ger

tr
tasto
p

ex. 7-8d J. S. Bach, *Christ lag in Todesbanden*, BWV 4, Verse V, 64–74

Soprano
 Tenor
 B.c.

So fei - ern wir das ho - he Fest, das So
 ho - he, das ho - he Fest
 fei - ern wir das ho - he Fest mit

ex. 7-8e J. S. Bach, *Christ lag in Todesbanden*, BWV 4, Verse VI, mm. 1–5

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Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

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J.S. Bach: Cantatas

French overture

THE NEW STYLE

Chapter: CHAPTER 7 Class of 1685 (II)

Source: MUSIC IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

The text of Cantata no. 61 has the more varied structure prescribed by Neumeister, with “madrigals” (recitative-plus-aria texts) and biblical verses intermixed with the chorale stanzas. Such a text is more literally homiletic, or sermonlike, than the chorale concerto. In the present case, for example, only the first verse of the actual chorale is used; the rest is commentary. That single verse (Ex. 7-9a) is given a remarkable setting: not just in “French overture style” but as an actual French overture—a stately march framing a jiglike fugue—scored, as Lully himself would have scored it, for a five-part string ensemble (two violins, two violas, cello plus bassoon continuo) supporting the usual four-part chorus (perhaps even, in Bach’s own church performances, only one singer to a part). This unusual hybrid, the kind of thing we have learned to expect from Bach, resonates in multiple ways with the chorale’s text and the cantata’s occasion.

With respect to the text, the overture format gives Bach a way of emphasizing its most madrigalian aspect—the antithesis between the stately advent of Christ and the joyous amazement of mankind (marked *gai, à la française*) that greets him. By depicting Christ’s coming with the rhythms that accompanied the French king’s *entrée*, Bach effectively evokes Christ as King. Most notable of all is the absolute avoidance, in this first section, of choral counterpoint: a single line of the chorale is given a unison enunciation by each choral section in succession, and then they all get together for the second line in a “hymnbook” texture.

The image displays a musical score for the French overture of Cantata no. 61, BWV 104, by J.S. Bach. The score is arranged in a system with ten staves. The top five staves are for the string ensemble: Violin I (Vln. I), Violin II (Vln. II), Viola I (Vla. I), Viola II (Vla. II), and Cello/Bassoon Continuo (Vc. Bn.). The bottom five staves are for the vocal ensemble: Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass, and Cello/Bassoon Continuo (B.c.). The score shows the first three measures of the piece. The string parts are active, playing a rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes. The vocal parts are silent in the first measure, indicating a unison enunciation of the first line of the chorale. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is common time (C).

ex. 7-9a J. S. Bach, *Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland*, BWV 61, Overture, mm. 1–7

In this way the traditional, generic use of imitation in the fast middle section of the overture gains by way of contrast a symbolic dimension, evoking in its multiple entries a crowd of marveling witnesses. With respect to the cantata's function, it has been suggested that by actually—and, from the liturgical point of view, gratuitously—labeling his chorus “Overture,” Bach meant to call attention to its placement at the very *opening* of the liturgical year. (Or else, conversely, the chorus's placement at the beginning of the first Advent cantata may have prompted Bach's choice of the *Ouverture* format.) Again, we are struck by the singlemindedness of Bach's expressive purpose. For the sake of the affective contrast between the stern beginning and the “gay” continuation, he is willing to “harden” and distort the chorale melody on its every appearance with a dissonant, indeed downright ugly, diminished fourth. Such a choice reveals an altogether different scale of values from those of the ostensible model, the brilliant French court ballet. In fact, Bach appears deliberately to contradict, even thwart that brilliance with his dissonant melodic intervals and clotted texture.

Tenor
 Der Heiland ist gekommen, hat unser armes Fleisch und Blut an sich ge-
 nommen und nimmt uns zu Blutsverwandten an. O allerhöchstes
 Gut, was hast du nicht an uns getan? Was tust du
 nicht noch täglich an den Deinen? Du kommst und läßt dein
 Licht, du kommst und läßt dein Licht mit vollem Segen
 scheinen, du kommst und läßt dein Licht mit vollem Se-
 gen scheinen, mit vollem Segen scheinen.

ex. 7-9b J. S. Bach, *Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland*, BWV 61, no. 2, recitativo

From the French court we now move to the Italian opera theater—or at least to the aristocratic Italian salon (where the original “cantatas” were sung)—for a tenor recitative and aria on a reflective text by Neumeister. But both the recitative and the aria differ enormously from any that we have encountered before. The recitative itself (Ex. 7-9b) ends with a little aria, where the bass begins to move (m. 10), and engages in imitations with the singer to point up the metaphorical “lightening” of the mood. This sort of lyricalized recitative, called *mezz’aria* (“half-aria”) in the Italian opera house, was a throwback to the fluid interplay of forms in the earliest operas and cantatas. By the eighteenth century it was a German specialty (and one of the ways, incidentally, in which Handel often betrayed his German origins in his Italian operas for English audiences).

The aria (Ex. 7-9c), a sort of gloss on the word “Come” from the chorale, is a gracious invitation to Christ set as a lilting gigue. The ritornello, unlike the Vivaldian type with its three distinct ideas, is all “spun out” of a single five-note phrase. It is played by the whole orchestra, massed modestly in a single unison line, creating with the voice and the bass a typical (that is, typically Bachian) trio-sonata texture. The singer’s entry would come as a surprise to connoisseurs of Italian opera, but not to connoisseurs of trio sonatas, for the voice enters with the same melody as the “ritornello” and spins out the same fund of motives. For this reason Bach can dispense with the lengthy

instrumental ritornello on the *da capo*. Instead, he writes *dal segno* (“from the sign”), placing the sign at the singer’s entry, which fulfills the “return” function perfectly well. This hybridization of operatic and instrumental styles is rarely if ever encountered in the opera house but standard operating procedure in Bach’s cantatas.

ex. 7-9c J. S. Bach, *Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland*, BWV 61, no. 3, aria, mm. 1–5, 17–21

The next recitative/aria pair is of a kind equally rare in Italian cantatas or operatic scenes: the recitative is sung by one singer and the aria by another. That is because Neumeister has cast the recitative (Ex. 7-9d) as Christ’s answer to the invitation tendered in the previous aria. It is a biblical verse, sung by the bass, the only voice of sufficient gravity to impersonate the Lord. The singer emphasizes the word *klopfe* (“I knock”) in two ways, first by a short melisma, and then by a quick repetition. And that is our signal as to the reason for the curious accompaniment *senza l’arco* (“without the bow,” or *pizzicato* in more modern, standard parlance). The periodic plucked chords (with a top voice that is as stationary as Bach could make it) are Bach’s way of rendering Christ’s knocking at the church door.

senza l'arco

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla. I

Vla. II

Vc.

Bass

Sie-he, sie-he, ich ste-he vor der Tür und klo - pfe an, und klo - pfe an.

B.c.
Org.

ex. 7-9d J. S. Bach, *Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland*, BWV 61, no. 4, recitativo, mm. 1-4

The soprano aria (Ex. 7-9e), sung by a disembodied soul-voice to its heart, is the Christian's answer to Christ's knock. Scored for voice and continuo only, it is an even more modest aria than the one before. Again the two parts share melodic material. Although only the motto phrase ("Open ye!") is obviously repeated when the voice enters, the whole vocal melody turns out on analysis to be a simplified version of the cello's ritornello, shorn of the gentle string-crossings. The fact that the singer's part is simpler than its accompaniment—especially when the high range of the part is taken into account—is already proof that although an operatic form has been appropriated, we are worlds away from the theater.

Indeed, soprano arias are likely to be the least adorned of all (and therefore especially suitable for "heartfelt" emotions, as here) because they were sung not by a gaudy castrato or a haughty prima donna but by a choirboy. (As in the Catholic church, so in the Lutheran, only male voices could be heard within its walls.) A Bach soprano aria, even one as simple as this one, was likely to strain the vocal and musicianly resources of the boy called upon to sing it. And yet when the text required it, Bach did not hesitate to write very difficult parts for the boys he trained.

Soprano

B.c.

Öff-ne dich, mein gan - zes

Her - ze,

öff- ne dich, mein gan - zes Her - ze, Je - sus kömmt

ex. 7-9e J. S. Bach, *Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland*, BWV 61, no. 5, aria, mm. 1–16

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J.S. Bach: Cantatas

Symbolism and music

MUSICAL SYMBOLISM, MUSICAL IDEALISM

Chapter: CHAPTER 7 Class of 1685 (II)

Source: MUSIC IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

Nor did he hesitate to write music of utter magnificence, despite the wan forces at his disposal. Undoubtedly his most splendid cantata was BWV 80, written at Leipzig for performance on the Feast of the Reformation, 31 October 1724. (Several of its parts were based on a much smaller cantata written at Weimar.) The *Reformationsfest*, as it is called in German, is the anniversary of the famous Ninety-five Theses, or articles of protest, which Luther posted on the door of the Castle Church at Wittenberg, 31 October 1517. It is thus the most important feast day specific to the German Protestant church and is always given a lavish celebration.

Bach's Cantata BWV 80 takes its name from *Ein' feste Burg* ("A mighty fortress"), Luther's most famous chorale, with a tradition of polyphonic settings going back to the early sixteenth century. It takes its musical shape from an alternation of choral movements based on chorale verses with recitatives and arias drawn from *Evangelisches Andachts-Opffer* ("Evangelical devotional offering," 1715), a book of devotional verse à la Neumeister by Salomo Franck, the Weimar court poet. At some later time, Bach's eldest son, Wilhelm Friedemann (1710–84), made the piece even more splendid by adding a *Stadtpeifer* contingent (three trumpets and timpani) to the scoring, possibly for a special performance to celebrate (in 1730) the bicentenary of the "Augsburg Confession," the official creed of the Lutheran church, which Protestants regard as their declaration of independence from the authority of Rome. A tour of the chorale movements from this work in its final, collaborative realization will be a trip to the very summit of traditional Lutheran church polyphony in its latest and ripest phase.

To get the full effect of the tour, we will survey the four settings in reverse order, beginning with the concluding *Cantionalsatz* (no. 8), a setting of the final hymn verse, included here simply as a reminder of the famous tune (Ex. 7-10a). Passing back over a tenor recitative (no. 6) and an alto/tenor duet (no. 7), praising those who show a steadfastness comparable to Luther's and promising them a reward in the next world, we come to no. 5, a setting of the third chorale verse, which speaks of Christians standing firm in their faith, and through it repelling a host of devils and fiends.

The image shows a musical score for a four-part setting of a chorale. The score is written for Soprano (S.), Alto (A.), Tenor (T.), and Bass (B.). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is common time (C). The lyrics are in German and English. The German lyrics are: "Das Wort sie sol - len las - sen stahn und kein Dank da - zu ha - ben." The English lyrics are: "The word of God no foe can harm, not e - ven know its mer - it." The music consists of four staves, each with a vocal line and its corresponding lyrics. The Soprano part is in the treble clef, the Alto in the treble clef, the Tenor in the treble clef, and the Bass in the bass clef. The lyrics are aligned with the notes of the music.

ex. 7-10a J. S. Bach, *Ein' feste Burg*, BWV 80, the four chorale movements, the concluding *Cantionalsatz*

What a natural for a concerto-style setting! The steadfast Christians are represented by the chorus, singing the successive lines of the hymn in unison (or to be literal, in octaves), alternating with a richly raucous instrumental ensemble—trumpets, alto and tenor oboes, and strings—that portrays the grimacing surrounding host with a wild Vivaldian ritornello, which begins with a diminution of the chorale incipit (Ex. 7-10b), continues through a sequence, and ends with “thundering” rage-tremolandi in the strings and literally unplayable lip-trills for the clarino trumpet that produce the aural equivalent of a scowl or an obscene gesture (Ex. 7-10c). A close look at the score will turn up many extra diminutions of the chorale, thrown in wherever they can be made to fit by dint of a deceptive cadence.

Once again we skip over a recitative/aria pair on a text by Franck (nos. 3–4), except to note that (Franck being a literary disciple of Neumeister) it is a virtual replay of the second recitative-aria pair in Cantata no. 61: exhortations from the bass (concluding in an arioso) followed by an invitation, addressed by the chastened soprano to Jesus, to “Komm in mein Herzens Haus” (“Come dwell within my heart’s abode”). The aria that comes before them (Ex. 7-10d), marked no. 2, is actually a fascinating hybrid: a duet that underscores the relationship between the reflective poetry and the emblematic chorale by combining text and gloss in a single contrapuntal texture.

The image displays a page of a musical score for J.S. Bach's 'Ein' feste Burg' BWV 80, specifically the concluding Cantionalsatz. The score is arranged in systems for various instruments. The first system includes three trumpets (Tpt. I, II, III) and timpani (Timp.). The second system includes three oboes (Ob. I, II, d.c.). The third system includes three violins (Vln. I, II, VI.). The fourth system includes the basso continuo (B.c.). The music is written in G major and 3/8 time. The score shows the beginning of the piece, with the trumpets playing a rhythmic pattern, the oboes and strings playing a melodic line, and the basso continuo providing a harmonic foundation.

ex. 7-10b J. S. Bach, *Ein' feste Burg*, BWV 80, the four chorale movements, no. 5, chorus, "Und wenn die Welt voll Teufel wär," beginning of ritornello

The soprano sings the second chorale verse to a highly decorated or "figural" variant of the original melody, while the bass carols away to Franck's commentary on the same verse, set in an unusual (for bass) coloratura style that, by imitating the virtuoso manner of a soprano or even a castrato, seems to reflect the text's promise that all who accept Christ will triumph over the limitations of the flesh. (As we have already observed, and as we shall observe again, this preoccupation with human limitations was a particularly important principle for Bach. It found reflections of all kinds in his music, with the emphasis sometimes on their exposure, sometimes on their overcoming.) The heterogeneous result could be called a "cantus-firmus aria" or a "sung chorale prelude." It might be better, though, not to try to give such unique symbolic contrivances names; for they, too, are meant to display transcendence of normal (that is, humanly ordained) categories. At any rate, the unfolding of the cantus firmus takes precedence over the normal aria form, which, shorn of a contrasting section and *da capo*, resembles a concerto movement more than ever. Both vocal soloists are given instrumental correlates. The chorale-singing soprano is doubled by an oboe that contributes extra decorative contortions to the "figuration" of the traditional melody. Sometimes voice and instrument can even be heard ornamenting a melodic phrase in two different ways at once.

The bass, meanwhile, is paired with massed strings in unison (another typically Bachian effect we first saw in Cantata no. 61) to provide a "spun-out" ritornello at the beginning and the end and elsewhere to act as the bass's "obligato" or accompanying counterpoint. The basic motive out of which this string ritornello is spun is enunciated in the very first measure: it is easily recognized as a stylized bugle call, a military tattoo that encapsulates the pervasive martial imagery of Luther's chorale poem, as it also did in operatic or madrigalian "rage" music going all the way back to Monteverdi.

ex. 7-10c J. S. Bach, *Ein' feste Burg*, BWV 80, the four chorale movements, no. 5, end of ritornello

Having traced the chorale now through three musical incarnations, at last we are ready to take on the cantata's opening number, a grandiose "chorale fantasia" of a kind peculiar to Bach's larger Leipzig cantatas. Even here, as everywhere in Bach's choral music, the method is basically archaic, albeit updated by the most sophisticated handling of tonal harmony anyone anywhere had yet achieved. The form, in its essentials, is that of the motet—a form that goes back to pre-Reformation times and had been discarded everywhere save the Lutheran church, where alone it continued in living and evolving use. (When Catholic composers used the motet style, as we know, it was in the guise of an officially retrospective *stile antico* in which stylistic evolution was forbidden; eighteenth-century Catholics, when they wrote motets, adopted—or tried to adopt—the sixteenth century "Palestrina style": not a style whose history *went back to Palestrina*, but a style whose history *had stopped with Palestrina*.)

The image shows a musical score for the Aria con Choral from J.S. Bach's Cantata BWV 80. The score is in G major and 3/4 time. It features five staves: Oboe (Ob.), Violin I and II (Vln. I, II), Soprano (S.), Bass (B.), and Bassoon (B.c.). The vocal parts have the following lyrics:

Soprano: Mit unsrer Macht
With all our strength

Bass: Al-les, al-les, al-les, al-les
All those, all those, all those, all those

Soprano: ist nichts ge-tan,
is nothing done,

Bass: les, was von Gott ge-bo-ren, al-les, was von Gott ge-bo-ren
those born of God are prais-ing, all those born of God are

ex. 7-10d J. S. Bach, *Ein' feste Burg*, BWV 80, the four chorale movements, no. 2, Aria con Choral, "Mit unser Macht," mm. 9–13

Score for "The Stronghold" (Bach), featuring vocal parts and instrumental accompaniment. The score is in G major and 3/4 time. The vocal parts (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) and the instrumental parts (Trumpets I, II, III, Trombone, Oboe, Violins I, II, Viola, Cello, Double Bass, Harpsichord, Organ, and Pedal) are shown. The lyrics are in German and Latin.

Vocal Parts:

- Soprano (S.):** fen; ein fe - ste Burg ist un - ser Gott, ein
ing; a migh - ty for - tres is our God, a
- Alto (A.):** Wehr und Waf - fen; ein
nev - er fail - ing; a
- Tenor (T.):** Waf - fen, ing;
- Bass (B.):** Wehr und Waf - fen, ein gu - te
nev - er fail - ing; a strong - hold

Instrumental Parts:

- Trumpets (Tpt. I, II, III):** Tpt. I has a melodic line with a fermata. Tpt. II and III have rhythmic accompaniment.
- Trombone (Timp.):** Rhythmic accompaniment.
- Oboe (Ob.):** Melodic line with a fermata.
- Violins (Vln. I, II) and Viola (Vla.):** Violins play a rhythmic accompaniment. Viola plays a melodic line.
- Cello (Vcl.) and Double Bass (Cb.):** Cello plays a rhythmic accompaniment. Double Bass plays a melodic line.
- Harpsichord (Hpd.) and Organ (Org.):** Harpsichord and Organ play a rhythmic accompaniment.
- Pedal (Ped.):** Pedal part for the organ.

S
A
T
B

Auf Erd ist nicht seins glei

vi

chen...

Erd...

erd...

auf

V

Erd...

I

[Auf Erd ist nicht seins]

[Auf Erd ist]

ex. 7-10f J. S. Bach, *Ein' feste Burg*, BWV 80, the four chorale movements, no. 1, harmonic "Far-Out Point"

A motet, takes shape as a series of discrete points of imitation (rather than a series of expositions of a single idea, like a fugue). In the opening fantasia of Cantata No. 80, the successive points of imitation (all accompanied by an independent and very active continuo and punctuated in Wilhelm Friedemann's arrangement by jocund ejaculations from the *Stadt-pfeifer* band) are based on the successive lines of the chorale. The first of them sets the procedure that will be followed consistently throughout. The chorale line is transformed by passing tones and a cadential flourish into a flowing "subject," which is then treated according to the rules of tonal counterpoint, in alternation with its "tonal answer," in which the first (tonic) and fifth (dominant) scale degrees are exchanged reciprocally. (Thus the tenors, entering with the subject, descend a fourth from D to A; the altos, entering with the answer, descend a fifth from A to D, and so on.) This sounds like a normal enough fugal exposition, but in fact it would be hard to find another fugue that begins with the tenor and alto entries. All the fugues we have seen thus far have proceeded either from top to bottom or from bottom to top. Deviations from this pattern, being deviations, require reasons, and such reasons are most often to be sought in the "poetic" or symbolic realm. In this case, the reason for opening out from the middle of the choral texture to the extremes becomes clear after the vocal exposition of the first "point" is complete. Unexpectedly, it is capped by the instruments (Ex. 7-10e), playing the cantus-firmus melody, sans figuration, in a marvelous canon that is close-spaced in time but could hardly be wider-spaced in pitch register. Both

instrumental lines are doubled at the octave in Wilhelm Friedemann's arrangement: the oboe by the clarino trumpet above (replacing Bach's original scoring for three oboes in unison), and the continuo both by the *violone* or double bass and by the 16-foot "trombone" (*Posaune*) pedal stop on the organ.

Bach hardly ever specified organ "registration," that is, the precise choice of "stops," the settings that determined exactly which ranks of pipes were to be activated by which keys and pedals. This, too, was a deviation from his normal practice and had a special "poetic" motivation. Thanks to these octave doublings, the capping statement of the "symbolum"—the emblem or article of faith—exceeds at both ends the range of the human voice, betokening transcendence. The special nature of this fugal exposition, then, has a multiple poetic purpose. The chorale is literally heard to spread out from the "midst" of the chorus—the human vehicles of the word—and pass into the all-encompassing universal reach of the divine.

This symbolism informs the exposition of the chorale's every line. What varies, once the basic format has been established through repetition (and recalling that the chorale is in the venerable AAB form), is the order of vocal entries. Bach's virtuosity in controlling this teeming contrapuntal microcosm is joyously displayed at a level that few composers, if any, could match. Study of the piece will bring many exhilarating discoveries, beginning with the way the fugal entries of the second line are dovetailed with those of the first, so that the chorale melody is actually set in counterpoint with itself.

Perhaps most noteworthy of all is the way Bach contrives a FOP—the harmonic far-out point, requisite for a fully articulated "tonal" form—between the penultimate line of the chorale and the final one. The penultimate line of the chorale melody ends on F#. Bach interprets this note as an applied dominant ("V of vi") and follows it with a choral exposition (Ex. 7-10f) in which the last line of the text is sung to an adjusted version of the first phrase of the tune that goes through a circle of fifths—tenors cadencing on B (vi), basses on E (ii), sopranos on A (V), and altos on D (I), thence to the instruments who bring in the actual last phrase of the melody for a properly "achieved" conclusion in the tonic. In this way Bach supplies a "modern" harmonic structure that is unavailable in the original chorale melody (which of course was composed in "pre-tonal" times), without actually departing from or interrupting the progress of the tune.

The wonder is that, from all that we know of the conditions under which Bach worked, he never had at his disposal the musical forces that could do anything approaching justice to this mighty fortress of a chorus. Documents survive that inform us both as to the puny resources Bach had to work with, and those that he would have thought adequate if not ideal. The most telling document of this kind is a memorandum he submitted to the Leipzig Town Council on 23 August 1730, a couple of months before the celebrations at which Cantata no. 80 may have been performed in his son's "big band" arrangement.¹⁶ The title already tells the story: "A Short but Most Necessary Draft for a Well-Appointed Church Music; Together with Certain Modest Reflections on the Decline of Same."

Bach's main concern was the choir, which consisted in large part of the boys he trained himself as head of the church music school. "Every musical choir should contain at least 3 sopranos, 3 altos, 3 tenors, and as many basses," he wrote, "so that even if one happens to fall ill (as very often happens, particularly at this time of year, as the prescriptions written by the school physician for the apothecary must show) at least a double chorus motet may be sung. (And note that it would be still better if the classes were such that one could have 4 singers on each part and thus could perform every chorus with 16 persons.)" Next Bach lists the minimum stable of instrumentalists who should be at the disposal of any self-respecting music director. It hardly seems a coincidence that (with the exception of the bassoons, which were probably assumed to be doublers of the continuo line) the ensemble he describes is exactly that called for in Cantata no. 80. Indeed, Bach immediately follows the list below with a supplementary list of instruments—flutes, recorders, etc.—that are also needed from time to time. But this is the minimum:

2 or even 3 for the	<i>Violino 1</i>
2 or 3 for the	<i>Violino 2</i>
2 for the	<i>Viola 1</i>
2 for the	<i>Viola 2</i>

2 for the	<i>Violoncello</i>
1 for the	<i>Violone</i>
2, or, if the piece requires, 3, for the	<i>Hautbois</i> (oboe)
1, or even 2, for the	<i>Bassoon</i>
3 for the	<i>Trumpets</i>
1 for the	<i>Kettledrums</i>

summa 18 persons at least, for the instrumental music

By Bach's own avowal, then, he considered thirty-four persons (plus himself and another keyboard player, who went without saying) to be the bare minimum required for a performance of a maximal piece like Cantata No. 80—and that number would have been thought puny indeed at any aristocratic, let alone royal, court. (Just recall Handel's Music for the Royal Fireworks, with its band of fifty-five wind players.) Except for avowed attempts to re-create the conditions of Bach's time (as in the so-called "historically authentic" performances that have been popular since the 1970s), the number would be considered stingy for a professional performance today. Yet Bach declares himself content with it, *if only*.

For the same memorandum reveals that in reality Bach could only count on eight regular instrumentalists (relying on local students or his own choristers to pinch-hit when possible), and that of the choristers at the school, whose services were required not just at Bach's own church, St. Thomas's, but at all four Leipzig churches (and who also had to pinch-hit as instrumentalists, as noted), Bach considered only 17 to be "usable" for music of "artistry" and "*gusto*" (taste). It has been suggested (by Bach scholar and performer Joshua Rifkin) that Bach's church music was normally performed by no more than one singer or player to a part, if that (for, as Bach complains, most of the time some parts had to be omitted from the texture altogether due to absences).¹⁷ One often daydreams about what the music heard today sounded like when first performed. It would seem that in the case of Bach, it might be better not to know.

Notes:

(16) "Short But Most Necessary Draft for a Well-Appointed Church Music," in *The Bach Reader*, eds. Hans T. David and Arthur Mendel (rev. ed., New York: Norton, 1966), pp. 120–24.

(17) Joshua Rifkin, "Bach's Chorus," *Musical Times* CXXIII (1982): 747–54; the controversy over this article has lasted more than twenty years and generated a sizeable literature of books, articles and manifestoes.

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Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

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Charles Burney

J.S. Bach: Cantatas

WHAT MUSIC IS FOR

Chapter: CHAPTER 7 Class of 1685 (II)

Source: MUSIC IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

Or perhaps not. We might actually learn a good deal about music and its purposes if we could hear a Bach cantata at its first performance—but only if we are prepared for a lesson that challenges our most basic assumptions about the nature and purpose of music.

Those assumptions were given a classic articulation by Charles Burney (1726–1814), the great English music historian, who knew Handel in his youth and played occasionally in his orchestras. “Music is an innocent luxury, unnecessary, indeed, to our existence, but a great improvement and gratification of the sense of hearing,” wrote Dr. Burney, who went on to define it more precisely as “the art of pleasing by the succession and combination of agreeable sounds.”¹⁸ These words, probably written in the early 1770s, were published in the front matter of Burney’s *General History of Music*, which began appearing in 1776. They are still paraphrased in most English dictionaries, and few readers of this book will find them surprising. They will seem to most music lovers merely commonsensical.

But even “common sense” has a history, and Burney’s definition of music reflects the intellectual history of the eighteenth century, when a complex of rationalistic (that is, antimystical, antimetaphysical) ideas now referred to as “The Enlightenment” rose to prominence and eventual dominance in Europe. They will receive a more extended discussion in a later chapter, when their musical manifestations (which we now call “Classicism”) come into view. We have had a glimpse of them already in Handel, whose career was shaped by a taste comparable to the one Burney described, and who regarded all of his music, even the most exalted or profound, as a distinguished entertainment.

They have much less to do with Bach, and virtually nothing to do with Bach’s church music, which embodied a pre-Enlightened—and when push came to shove, a violently anti-Enlightened—temper. Such music was a medium of truth, not beauty, and the truth it served—Luther’s truth—was often bitter. Some of Bach’s most striking works were written to persuade us—no, *reveal* to us—that the world is filth and horror, that humans are helpless, that life is pain, and that reason is a snare. Even in his most exuberant work, like Cantata no. 80, Bach’s purpose in church was never just to please, and the sounds he combined there were often anything but agreeable.

When his music was pleasing, it was usually in order to indoctrinate or cajole. Just as often Bach aimed to torture the ear. When the world of man rather than that of God was his subject, he could write music that for sheer, deliberate ugliness has perhaps been approached (mainly by much later composers, after Bach’s momentous nineteenth-century “rediscovery”), but never surpassed. The daring it took to write such passages is perhaps the best testimony to Bach’s unique genius. They would have ruined Handel. But Bach’s pious congregation would have understood his purpose in a way that we can do only by dint of great imaginative effort.

Take Ex. 7-11 to begin with. It is the ritornello to a bass aria, “Ächzen und erbärmlich Weinen/hilft der Sorgen Krankheit nicht” (“Groaning [literally, saying ‘Ach’] and pitifully wailing or worrying won’t relieve sickness”) from Cantata BWV 13, *Meine Seufzer, meine Tränen* (“My sighs, my tears”). Despite its low BWV number, this is one of the later Leipzig cantatas, first performed 20 January (the second Sunday after Epiphany) 1726. With *Seufzer* in the title and *Ächzen* in the text, it is no wonder to see lots of slurred descending half steps—“sighs”—in all the parts. That was a conventional symbol that evoked the thing represented precisely the way a word does. Also to be expected were lots of dissonant appoggiaturas, a high degree of chromaticism, and (recalling Handel’s “They loathed to drink of the river”) chords of the diminished seventh.

But now consider the counterpoint in mm. 3–4: namely, the way in which the parallel “sighs” in the obbligato line

and the basso continuo are harmonized. At the beginning of m. 3, the two voices move in parallel at the distance of nine semitones. This unusual way of specifying the interval is necessary here because, in terms of spelling and function, the intervals, though produced by parallel motion, are different. One voice progresses from one scale degree to another ($E\flat - D$), while the other inflects a single degree ($F\sharp - F$). Thus the first harmonic interval formed between them is a diminished seventh, while the second is a major sixth. The harmonic progression, while unusual, can be rationalized as a “7 – 6 suspension” according to the traditional rules of counterpoint.

In the middle of m. 3, the intervals are still 7 – 6, even though the sixth is augmented and the constant parallel distance between the two voices is ten semitones, an interval always heard as a dissonance. This is a truly pungent progression that will take most listeners by unpleasant surprise, although on reflection it can be “justified” both in terms of counterpoint, and of course in terms of expression, since affliction and pain is the theme.

Only expression can justify what happens on the downbeat of m. 4, when the parallel doubling is again at the distance of ten semitones but both parts make degree progressions, so that both intervals are sevenths. By the rules—or, more pertinently, by customary *practice*—a progression of parallel sevenths is a solecism, a mistake. The writing is diseased. The effect on the naivest ear, all the more on a schooled one, is almost literally nauseous. This kind of direct analogy goes beyond Handel’s ingratiating ways of representing horror. There is no way this passage could be described as pleasant or entertaining. That is not its purpose.

5. Aria

Fl. I, II
5-6

Org.

5 6 5 3 4+ 7 6 6 b 7 b 6 4 3

7 6 7 7 7 7 5 6 b 5 6

6 5 6 5 6 5 6 7 6 b 4+ 2 6 4

ex. 7-11 J. S. Bach, Cantata: *Meine Seufzer, meine Tränen*, BWV 13, bass aria, “Ächzen und

erbärmlich Weinen” (ritornello), mm. 1–8

One can find such examples in abundance in Bach, many of them much stronger than this one. The text, of course, is the key to finding them. Cantata BWV 101, composed in Leipzig for performance on 13 August 1724, opens with a chorale fantasia that pits the melody of the Lutheran Lord’s Prayer (“Vater unser im Himmelreich”) as cantus firmus against a choral counterpoint that carries the text of a sixteenth-century hymn:

- Nimm von uns, Herr, du treuer Gott
 - Die schwere Straf und große Not,
 - Die wir mit Sünden ohne Zahl
 - Verdienet haben allzumal.
 - Behüt für Krieg und teurer Zeit,
 - Für Seuchen, Feur und großem Leid.
-
- [Take from us, O Lord, thou faithful God
 - The heavy punishment and great distress
 - That we with our numberless sins
 - Have only too well deserved.
 - Preserve us against war and famine,
 - Plague, fire and devastation.]

die
die schwe - re Straf' und

schwe - re Straf' und gro - sse Noth, die
gro - sse Noth, die schwe - re Straf' und
die schwe - re

die schwe -
schwe - re — Straf und gro - sse — Noth, und
gro - sse Noth, — die schwe - re —
Straf — und — gro - sse Noth, die schwe - re Straf die

re Straf und gro -
gro - sse Noth, — die schwe - re — Straf —
Straf und gro - sse Noth, die
schwe - re — Straf und gro - sse Noth, die schwe - re

The image shows a musical score for the opening chorus of J.S. Bach's BWV 101, "Nimm von uns, Herr, du treuer Gott". It is a piano reduction of the second line. The score consists of five staves. The top four staves are vocal parts (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) with lyrics: "sse Noth, und gro - sse Noth, und gro - sse Noth, schwe - re Straf' und gro - sse Noth, Straf' und gro - sse Noth,". The bottom staff is the piano accompaniment, featuring a complex texture with many dissonances and semitonal clashes, particularly in the first few measures under the slurs.

ex. 7-12 J. S. Bach, *Nimm von uns, Herr, du treuer Gott*, BWV 101, opening chorus

Ex. 7-12 is a “piano reduction” of Bach’s setting of the second line, so that the scarcely credible dissonances with which he evoked punishment, distress, war, famine, plague, fire, and devastation can be most compactly represented and easily observed. Almost all of them, semitonal clashes, false relations and all, arise out of a reckless deployment of “nonharmonic tones” that arise in turn out of expressive “sigh” motives or their inversions, equipped with pickups that render the first notes under the slurs maximally discordant both harmonically and melodically. This music will never bring a smile, the way Handel’s famine, plague, fire, and devastation did in *Israel in Egypt*. And that is only partly because of the extremity of the musical means, which goes so far beyond the boundaries of what Handel or Burney or their audiences would have identified as good taste. It is also because the sufferers depicted are not “them” but “us.”

Even more unsettling are the choruses and arias where Bach—following what Carl Friedrich Zelter, a choral conductor who played a major role in Bach’s nineteenth-century rediscovery, called his “altogether contemptible German church texts”—gave vent to what not only Zelter but all “Enlightened” thinkers of his day despised as the “earnest polemic of the Reformation.”¹⁹ Indeed, many of Bach’s texts express ideas that most listeners, not only in Zelter’s day but in our own, would find abhorrent, for almost all modern ideas of social justice, reasoned discourse, and personal integrity are derived from the ideas of the Enlightenment.

There is no evidence that Bach believed in them. On the contrary: we have every reason to assume that he believed not in freedom, equality, and human institutions of justice as saving forces in the world, but in faith and God’s grace—as we may learn from a harrowing tenor aria, “Schweig nur, taumelnde Vernunft!” (“Shut up, stumbling reason!”) from Cantata BWV 178, composed in Leipzig in the summer of 1724. The text is a paraphrase of a verse from a sixteenth-century hymn. Past the first line the message of the text is one of comfort, but Bach is fixated on that fierce and derisive opening line—indeed, on just the opening word. Out of it he builds practically the whole first section of his *da capo* aria, crowding all the rest into a cursory and soon superseded middle section.

Over and over the tenor shrieks, “Schweig nur, schweig!” leaping now a sixth, now a seventh, now an octave (Ex. 7-13). Meanwhile, the accompanying orchestra, Reason’s surrogate, reels and lurches violently. The effect is nothing short of terrifying—perhaps even more now than in Bach’s own time, since we who remember the twentieth century have greater reason than Bach’s contemporaries ever had to wince at the sound of a high-pitched German voice stridently shouting reason down.

Vln. I
 Vln. II
 Vla.
 Tenor
 Bc.

Schweig, schweig, schweig nur, schweig, schweig nur, schweig,

schweig, schweig, schweig, schweig nur, tau - - - meln-de Ver- nunft, schweig,

ex. 7-13 J. S. Bach, Cantata: *Wo Gott der Herr nicht bei uns hält*, BWV 178, tenor aria, “Schweig nur, taumelnde Vernunft!”, mm. 11–17

Even when Bach is not expressing actively anti-Enlightenment sentiments like these in his cantatas, his settings are pervaded with a general antihumanism such as we encountered (at least according to one interpretation) in the Brandenburg Concertos, with their implied religiously motivated contempt for human hierarchies and power relations. The contempt is much more overt in the cantatas and shows up precisely in Bach’s seeming unconcern for practical performance considerations. A work like Cantata no. 80, plausibly beyond the capabilities of the performers to whom it was performed assigned, could be looked upon as “idealistic” in this sense, deliberately contriving a splendor and suggesting a perfection beyond terrestrial accomplishment (though certainly not beyond imagining or aspiring to).

There is another side to this as well, when Bach seems deliberately to engineer a bad-sounding performance by putting the apparent demands of the music beyond the reach of his performers and their equipment. Ex. 7-14 contains two “middle sections” from cantata arias. The first (Ex. 7-14a), “Liebster Gott” (“Beloved God”) from Cantata BWV 179, composed for Leipzig in 1723, is scored for a (boy) soprano and two *oboi da caccia* or “hunting oboes,” ancestors of the modern English horn. The aria begins and ends in A minor, but the middle section weirdly modulates ever “flatward,” so that it makes its final cadence in C minor.

tr
p
p

Hilf mir; Je - su, Got - tes

This system contains the first four measures of the piece. It features a vocal line in the middle staff and piano accompaniment in the top and bottom staves. The piano part includes a trill in the first measure and a piano (*p*) dynamic marking in the second measure. The lyrics are: "Hilf mir; Je - su, Got - tes".

Lamm, hilf mir, Je - su Got - tes

This system contains the next four measures. The piano accompaniment continues with a steady eighth-note pattern in the bass line. The lyrics are: "Lamm, hilf mir, Je - su Got - tes".

Lamm, ich ver - sink in tie - fen Schlanum
 in tie - fen Schlanum, hilf mir, Je - su, Got - tes
 Lamm, ich ver - sink in tie - fen Schlanum!

ex. 7-14a Cantata: *Siehe zu, daß deine Gottesfurcht*, BWV 179, soprano aria “Liebster Gott,” mm. 62–81

Not only is the flatward modulation symbolic of *catabasis*, or “falling” in the theological sense (as a sharpward modulation symbolizes *anabasis* or elevation), the specific key chosen for the cadence also puts the instruments in a harmonic region where they are simply incapable of playing in tune, especially when playing, as Bach forces them to do, in their lowest, least tractable range.²⁰ The boy, too, is asked to descend to the very bottom of his range and even beyond, where he loses all tonal support. The whole performance will inevitably come out sounding loathsome and disgraceful. And these are the words (adapted from the prophet Habbakuk): “My sins sicken me like pus in my bones; help me, Jesus, Lamb of God, for I am sinking in deepest slime.”

Nowadays, with instruments that have undergone more than a century of adaptation and with no strictures to prevent a secular performance by a well-trained mezzo-soprano, the technical demands of the aria could be easily met. But would the performance thereby become a better one? Or would an important part of the religious message of the piece—that humans are helpless and hopeless in their fallen state—be lost for the sake of mere sensory gratification?

Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Bass, and Cello/Bass staves. The music is in G major and 4/4 time. The first system shows the beginning of the piece with a *p* dynamic. The lyrics "Hier schmeckt ihr Je - su Gü - te schon, und" are written below the Bass and Cello/Bass staves.

Continuation of the musical score. The lyrics "hof - fet noch des Glau - bens Lohn, und hof -" are written below the Bass and Cello/Bass staves.

Continuation of the musical score. The lyrics "fet noch des Glau - bens Lohn nach ei - nem sanf - ten" are written below the Bass and Cello/Bass staves. The piece concludes with a *pp* dynamic.

First system of musical notation. It consists of five staves: two treble clefs, two bass clefs, and a vocal line. The vocal line has the lyrics "To des schla".

Second system of musical notation. It consists of five staves: two treble clefs, two bass clefs, and a vocal line. The vocal line has the lyrics "fer; hier schmeckt ihr Je - su Gü - te schon, und".

Third system of musical notation. It consists of five staves: two treble clefs, two bass clefs, and a vocal line. The vocal line has the lyrics "hof fet noch des Glau - bens Lohn und hof".

Fourth system of musical notation. It consists of five staves: two treble clefs, two bass clefs, and a vocal line. The vocal line has the lyrics "fet noch des Glau - bens Lohn nach ei - nem sanft - ten". The system ends with a *fp* dynamic marking.

To - des schla - fe, nach ei - nem sanf - ten To - des schla - fe.

Da Capo.

ex. 7-14b Cantata: *Du Hirte Israel, höre*, BWV 104, bass aria “Beglückte Heerde,” middle section

The bass aria, “Beglückte Heerde, Jesu Schafe” (“O lucky herd of Jesus-sheep”), from the pastoral Cantata no. 104, *Du Hirte Israel höre* (“Hear us, O shepherd of Israel”) is on the face of it a sweet and gentle (if slightly macabre) lullaby, but it harbors within a veritable assault by the composer on the performer. The text of the middle section (Ex. 7-14b) reads, “Here you shall taste of Jesus’s goodness and look forward, as your reward for faith, to the sweet sleep of death.” The vocal line extends for eighteen measures in a stately meter without a single rest, and with notes lasting as much as nine beats. It will reduce any singer who assays it at an appropriate tempo to a gasping, panting state in which, were the aria to continue another two minutes, he would surely receive his reward.

This undermining of human agency is something that Bach engineers again and again. Unlike Handel’s music, Bach’s church music serves the purposes of the church—that is, ministering to the soul’s salvation—and presents modern secular performers with a dilemma: either adapt the performance to the tastes of the modern secular audience (whether by modernizing the performing forces, for example, or by “secularizing” the tempos or the general demeanor) and risk losing the full force of the expressive message encoded in the music, or perform the music in an appropriate manner and risk perplexing, fatiguing, or even insulting the audience. That is why only a handful of Bach’s cantatas can be said to have really joined the modern performance repertory, and a thoroughly unrepresentative handful at that.

Besides a couple of amusing secular items like the so-called “Coffee cantata” (about a young girl’s passion for coffee—then a novelty—and the headaches it causes her father), composed for Bach’s Collegium Musicum (which actually performed in a coffee shop), the “popular” cantatas include no. 51, *Jauchzet Gott in allen Landen* (“Rejoice in God in every land”), a brilliant display piece for soprano and the only church cantata Bach ever composed for a women’s voice (and one of the few pieces he actually called a cantata); and no. 140, *Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme* (“Wake up, the [watchman’s] voice is calling”), in which Bach set a couple of love duets between Christ and the

Christian soul in the style of “the pretty little Dresden tunes.”

Notes:

(18) Burney, *A General History of Music*, ed. F. Mercer, Vol. I (New York: Dover, 1957), p. 21.

(19) Carl Friedrich Zelter to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1827), quoted in R. Taruskin, *Text and Act* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 310.

(20) See Eric Chafe, *Tonal Allegory in the Vocal Music of J. S. Bach* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991), p. 15.

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J.S. Bach: Oratorios, Passions, Latin works

Mass: 18th century

Passion

BACH'S "TESTAMENTS"

Chapter: CHAPTER 7 Class of 1685 (II)

Source: MUSIC IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

Bach's best-known religious pieces are the ones most comparable to Handel's oratorios and to even later, Catholic religious music. They include two Passion settings (out of five he is once reported to have composed), one based on the Gospel of Matthew and the other on the Gospel of John. And, a bit paradoxically, they include a grandiose concerted setting, for chorus in as many as eight parts and an exceptionally variegated orchestra, of the Latin Mass, a text for which there was no liturgical use at all in the Lutheran church. These were the works through which Bach was "rediscovered" and reclaimed for the performing repertoire in the nineteenth century.

The Mass was assembled out of settings that had accumulated over a period of more than two decades. About half of it is derived from known prototypes (cantata choruses, mainly), and most of the rest is presumed to consist of "parodies" of this kind as well, even though their prototypes are no longer extant. The work is therefore cast in a mixture of styles that reflects its miscellaneous origins. Some of the choruses, although never without an elaborate instrumental accompaniment, are written in a deliberately archaic style that comes closer than ever to the official Catholic *stile antico*. Some of the arias, by contrast, are cast in the kind of showy, courtly ("galant"), somewhat operatic idiom that Bach associated with Dresden.

The Catholic electoral court at Dresden, in fact, seems to have been the original destination of the Mass, or at least of the Kyrie and Gloria, which Bach sent in 1733 to the newly ascended Elector, Friedrich August II, who also reigned (as Augustus III) as the titular king of Poland. Friedrich August was already a notable patron of the arts, from whom Bach was now seeking a favor—not a job but a title (Hofkomponist) that would entitle him to better treatment and higher pay from the Leipzig town council. Bach eventually did receive the title but not until 1736, after sending another petition.

The music, meanwhile, languished unheard. Bach returned to it in the late 1740s, after he had effectively retired from his cantorate at Leipzig, and by adding to it a Sanctus he had partly composed as early as 1724 and assembling from parodies a Credo and an Agnus Dei, he turned it into a kind of testamentary piece—a summary of all types of ecclesiastical composition unified by the ancient Latin text of the Mass, but far too long and elaborate to have been intended for actual performance anywhere.

Performances began only when Bach had been assimilated to the secular concert repertoire in the nineteenth century. (Hence the curiously secular name by which it is generally known: "Mass in B Minor," or "The B-Minor Mass," after the key of the opening Kyrie, although most of the music is actually in D major.) Thus it is a work that has existed, in a sense, only posthumously; and it is to later music only that it can be compared. The first of many "oratorio-style" Masses in the repertoire, it is the largest of them all, but it is in no real sense the progenitor of the line. That line originated in Austria and reached its peak some decades after Bach's death with the work of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven. But as we will learn in a later chapter, the antecedents to this Austrian genre were Italian, not German. Bach's Mass, although a famous work today and therefore an essential part of the history of music from our perspective, was from the perspective of its own time an isolated curio—or, given its size, perhaps a white elephant.

A description of the *Gloria*, part of the original offering to the Saxon elector, can be our entrée into this glorious anomaly. The text is broken up into nine separate segments, if one counts the two contrasting halves of the first chorus as two separate settings. Bach certainly did, because he is known to have adapted them from two separate preexisting pieces. The first, a quick gigue, marked *vivace* ("lively") and scored for an oversized orchestra of twenty

or more (as per Bach's "Short but Most Necessary Draft"), features the trumpets and drums for a brilliant evocation of the title word (which, as we know, is merely intoned by the priest in an actual liturgical Mass). The second, a hushed evocation of "peace on earth," is suddenly in the slow "common time" of the *stile antico*. The trumpets and drums are silent for the most part, reintroduced only toward the end so that the piece can end grandly. Like Monteverdi's eight-part *Gloria* from the *Selva morale* (see chapter 1), Bach's "Gloria" chorus, with its vividly projected antithesis, is in effect a vaulting madrigal.

Thereafter, the Gloria proceeds as an alternation of choruses with arias for each of the five soloists in turn. The first aria ("Laudamus te"), for the second soprano, sets words of praise in an ingratiatingly ornate and courtly chamber style. The ritornello is a veritable violin concerto, and the vocal writing, with its trills and roulades, is as close to a castrato idiom as Bach ever came. This music was obviously meant for no choirboy, but for a Dresden court "canary." The chorus that follows ("Gratias agimus tibi") sets words of thanks in an austere, archaic idiom. Bach first used this music when setting the German equivalent of its text ("Wir danken dir, Gott") in a Leipzig cantata two years before.

Next comes another operatic showpiece ("Domine Deus"), a duet for the first soprano and the tenor, in which the consubstantiality of the Father and the Son is symbolized by the twinning of the two voices. Each sings in turn about the Father and the Son, but whenever the soprano is singing "Domine Deus" the tenor is singing "Domine Fili," and vice versa. Here the concertizing instrument in the ritornellos is the solo flute, playing for the most part in its most brilliant range, with typically "galant" affectations in the phrasing, such as slurred pairs (possibly also symbolic of consubstantiality) and long appoggiaturas.

The chorus that follows—"Qui tollis peccata mundi," "[O Thou] who takest away the sins of the world"—maintains the lightness of the preceding duet as it describes the gentle cleansing action of the Lamb of God. The music had previously served to introduce a Leipzig cantata, on the words "Schauet doch und sehet, ob irgend ein Schmerz sei" (Behold and see if there is any pain). In both of its contexts, then, the music represented the alleviation of distress.

The last part of the Gloria puts two arias back to back before a concluding chorus. The first aria ("Qui sedes") is an alto solo, with an obbligato for the *oboe d'amore* (halfway in size between modern oboe and English horn) that implies an *affettuoso* style of performance. The instrument closely matches the singer's range and twines all around the vocal part as the singer pleads operatically with the Son, sitting at the right hand of the Father, for mercy. The second aria ("Quoniam tu solus," "For only Thou"), a commanding item for the bass, features a rare obbligato for *corno da caccia* ("hunting horn," now called French horn) accompanied by not one but two bassoons, thus adding two more instruments to the already swollen instrumental roster. This aria may well have been adapted from a cantata in which the text used words like hunting, chasing, or pursuit as metaphors—words for which the horn itself could stand as a further metaphor. As adapted here to the Mass text, the singularity of the scoring may symbolize the singularity of Christ, as thrice detailed by the text.

The final chorus, "Cum sancto spiritu," invokes the glory of the Trinity with a return to the *vivace* tempo and the brassy scoring of the opening chorus. It is in three sections, the middle being a fast melismatic fugue somewhat reminiscent of the ones in *Messiah*, and adding an element of showy virtuosity to the choral writing that is as rare in Bach as it is frequent in the oratorios of Handel, his great expatriate contemporary.

Handwritten musical score for the opening double chorus of the St. Matthew Passion by J.S. Bach. The score is titled "PASSIO secundum MATTHEUM a doi Cōri" and is written for two choirs and two orchestras. The instruments listed include Trumpets, Trombones, Violins, Viola, Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass, and Continuo. The score is written in G major and 3/8 time. A library stamp from the Gymnasium Reg. Joachims in Amalia is visible in the lower right quadrant of the manuscript.

fig. 7-7 Bach's autograph manuscript of the opening double chorus from the St. Matthew Passion.

There is nothing like this chorus in Bach's surviving Passion oratorios, which were written for church use on the afternoon of Good Friday, the most solemn day in the Christian year. The one based on the Book of John, written earlier, was first performed in Leipzig in 1724, during Bach's first year as Cantor there, and revived several times thereafter. Its text includes arias and a chorus drawn from the Passion poem by Brockes that Handel had set earlier. The St. Matthew Passion—conceived as a unity but on an enormous scale both as to duration and as to performing forces (two antiphonal choirs, each with its own supporting orchestra)—was probably first performed in 1727.

In both Passions, following the post-Neumeister conventions of the genre, the text operates on three levels, which interact to produce a sort of biblical opera-with-commentary. The original Gospel text is set as semidramatic recitative. There is a narrator (called the Evangelist), but all direct discourse (lines spoken directly by the actors in the story) is assigned to other solo voices, and lines spoken collectively by the "people," following the "turba" (crowd) convention that goes back to the sixteenth century, were sung by the chorus, often in imitative textures that emphasized heterogeneity.

These recitatives are interrupted at strategic moments, just as they are in opera, by reflective arias—or "madrigals,"

as the Lutheran poets continued to call them—meant to be set in da capo form. As in the cantatas (where, however, there is no plot line), these arias are not sung by characters but by “voice-personas” who represent and give utterance to the poet’s own meditations on the events of the biblical narration, and instruct the congregation on their Christian significance. In the St. Matthew Passion, all the arias, as well as the reflective choruses that open and close each part, are adapted from a single long Passion poem in *Erbauliche Gedancken* (“Edifying thoughts”), a cycle of texts for music by a friend of Bach’s, a Leipzig lawyer and playwright named Christian Friedrich Henrici (1700–64), who wrote under the name Picander and provided the texts for many of Bach’s Leipzig cantatas. The third textual element in Bach’s Passions consisted of chorales in “Cantional” or hymnbook style that are frequently interpolated to provide an additional level of commentary (and, possibly, congregational participation).

The two Bach Passion settings are quite distinct in character. The shorter and faster-moving St. John Passion is as close to an opera as Bach ever wrote (if for the moment we ignore a few minor civic or coffeehouse comedies that Bach called *dramma per musica*). The *turba* scenes before Pontius Pilate, in particular, show the Roman viceroy, the crowd, and the Evangelist interacting with great dispatch. In the excerpt given in Ex. 7-15, Pontius Pilate offers Jesus back to the crowd, who reject him and call for his crucifixion. The sharp dactylic rhythms in the orchestra recall the cry of “Kreuzige!” (“Crucify!”) from the previous chorus.

The St. Matthew Passion places more emphasis on contemplation than on action. Its emblematic sections are not the *turba* choruses but the monumental framing choruses on words by Picander. The one that opens the work, “Kommt, ihr Töchter, helft mir klagen” (“Come, O daughters, help me in my lamentation”) is a conception of unparalleled breadth. By the use of antiphonal choruses (and orchestras) asking and exclaiming about the tragic scene at Golgotha, a panoramic scene is conjured up. The heavy bass tread and the slow harmonic rhythm in a broad meter at once sketches the movement of the procession of the cross and conveys the mournful affect of a traditional *lamento*.

Trout
Es war a-ber der Rüst-tag in o-ster-n um die sechs-te Stun-de, und er spricht zu den
Bc.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Sop.
Abo.
Tenor
Bass
Bc.

Es
Jü- dem: Plaus Sie schrie-en
Se- her, das ist eu-er Kö-nig!

Weg, weg mit dem, weg, weg, mit dem, weg, weg, mit
Weg, weg mit dem, weg, weg, weg, weg mit dem, weg, weg.
a- ber: Weg, weg, weg, weg mit dem weg, weg, weg, weg mit
Weg, weg mit dem, weg, weg, weg, weg mit dem, mit

dem weg, weg, weg, weg mit dem, kreu - - -
weg, weg mit dem, mit dem weg, weg, kreu -
dem, weg, weg mit dem, mit dem weg, weg, weg, weg mit dem, mit dem weg,
dem weg, weg, weg, weg mit dem, mit dem weg, weg,
5 5 5 5 5 5 5 5

- - - - - zi - ge ihn, weg, weg mit dem, mit dem weg, weg,
- - - - - zi - ge ihn, weg, weg mit dem, mit dem weg,
weg, kreu - - - - - zi - ge
kreu - - - - -
6 6 6 6 6 6 6 6

Pilate: "See ye your King, yea, behold Him."

Evangelist: They cried out ever:

Chorus: Away with Him, away with Him,
crucify Him.

ex. 7-15 J. S. Bach, *St. John Passion, turba*, "Weg! Weg!," mm. 40–51

And it all turns out to be a gigantic chorale prelude, when a third choir of boys (*soprano ripieno* as Bach puts it) chimes in with the so-called Passion Chorale (Ex. 7-16), set as a cantus firmus above the fray: *O Lamm Gottes unschuldig/am Stamm des Kreuzes geschlachtet* ("O spotless Lamb of God, slaughtered on the Cross's trunk"). The innocence of the victim is cast in relief against the enormity of the sacrifice by playing the G major of the chorale against the E minor of its environment. A whole panoply of tonal and harmonic effects of which Bach was then uniquely the master—modulations, deceptive cadences, and other feints—is enlisted to underscore this tragic contrast. Even without the external trappings of drama, Bach was able through his manipulation of tonal ("purely musical") procedures to express the essence of the dramatic conflict embodied in the Passion story as viewed from the Christian perspective.

Bach was well aware of the special place the St. Matthew Passion occupied within his vast output. He regarded it, too, as a testamentary work. He prepared a lavish calligraphic score of the work, replete with inks of different colors, to preserve it at a time when most music, including his, was composed for specific occasions, to be used and thereafter discarded. That fair copy passed into Carl Friedrich Zelter's possession and provided the vehicle for Bach's rediscovery and canonization as a musical Founding Father when the twenty-year-old Felix Mendelssohn, a pupil of Zelter who would have a distinguished career as composer in his own right, conducted a performance of the St. Matthew Passion at the Berlin Singakademie on 11 March 1829, a little over a century after its first performance in Leipzig.

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Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

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Bach Revival

Johann Gottlieb Goldberg

THE BACH REVIVAL

Chapter: CHAPTER 7 Class of 1685 (II)

Source: MUSIC IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

The image shows a page of a musical score for the opening chorus of J.S. Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*, measures 34-36. The score is arranged in a standard orchestral format with vocal parts and instruments. The vocal parts (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) have lyrics in German. The instrumental parts include Flute I & II, Oboe I & II, Violin I & II, Viola, Bassoon, and Organ. The lyrics for the vocal parts are: "an Stamm des Kreuzes geschlach- ter", "gru, se - het den Bräu - ti - gam, seht ihn als wie ein Lamm, se - het den Bräu - ti -", "gru, se - het den Bräu - ti - gam, seht ihn als wie ein Lamm, se - het den Bräu - ti -", "kle - gru, se - het den Bräu - ti - gam, seht ihn als wie ein Lamm, se - het den Bräu - ti -", "gru, se - het den Bräu - ti - gam, seht ihn als wie ein Lamm, se - het den Bräu - ti -". The organ part has figured bass notation. The instrumental parts are mostly rhythmic accompaniment.

ex. 7-16 J. S. Bach, *St. Matthew Passion*, opening chorus, mm. 34-36

This was an event of immense cultural significance. It placed Bach in a new context, one in which the very aspects of

his style that had led to his temporary eclipse—its complexity, its conservatism, its uncompromising religiosity, its very asperity, which caused it to be dismissed by some critics even during his lifetime as showing an “excess of art” and a “turgid and confused style”—could now be prized and held up as a model for emulation.²¹ The conditions that brought about this change in Bach’s status had a great deal to do with the burgeoning of Romanticism, to which we will return in a later chapter. There was another aspect to the reassessment of Bach, however, which needs our attention now.

The nineteenth-century Bach revival focused mainly on just a few works: the Passion oratorios, the B-minor Mass, the Well-Tempered Clavier, and a few later masterworks of an old-fashioned, abstract nature in which Bach gave full rein to his unrivaled contrapuntal virtuosity. This last group included the Goldberg Variations, a huge cycle of thirty keyboard pieces, including a series of intricate canons, all based on a single “aria” (ostinato) bass line. (The set is named—not by Bach but by posterity—after Johann Gottlieb Goldberg, one of Bach’s pupils, who supposedly commissioned it on behalf of his patron, Count Kayserling, the Russian ambassador to the Saxon court, an insomniac who needed some engrossing music to divert him during sleepless nights.) For a really dazzling quick idea of Bach’s contrapuntal wizardry we might look, not at the Goldberg Variations themselves, but at a little extra that he tossed off one day, and that remained undiscovered until the 1970s. In the flyleaf of his own personal copy of the printed edition of the work (the fourth volume of the *Clavier-Übung*, issued in 1747), Bach inscribed fourteen riddle canons, all based on the first eight notes of the Goldberg “aria” bass. Ex. 7-17 shows the bass line, the last canon (“Canon à 4, per Augmentationem et Diminutionem”) as Bach wrote it, and a realization (by Christoph Wolff, who discovered and authenticated the canons). The first eight sixteenth-notes of the single notated line in Ex. 7-17b are an inversion of the Goldberg bass, transposed to the upper fifth and subjected to a threefold rhythmic diminution. The realization accompanies the notated part with its inversion at the upper fourth with note values doubled; with its literal transposition at the lower fourth with note values doubled again; and inverted at the lower fifth, with the note values doubled a third time, thus restoring the original bass.



ex. 7-17a Goldberg bass



ex. 7-17b Canon no. 14 as written by Bach

ex. 7-17c Canon no. 14 as realized by Christoph Wolff

It is probably fair to say that the sheer technical dexterity in the art of composition that Bach exhibits here has never been surpassed; it is all the more impressive in the context of little joke pieces like these, for only the truly learned can afford to wear their learning lightly. (Why exactly fourteen canons, by the way? Because the name Bach, if translated into numbers according to the positions of its constituent letters in the alphabet—a device called *gematriya* that goes back to Hebrew cabbalistic lore—comes out $2 + 1 + 3 + 8 = 14$. Bach's numerological virtuosity has only begun to be investigated. Some scholars suspect that it may rival his musical skills; others, favoring a more "Enlightened" view of Bach, remain skeptical.) A more formal exhibition of skill was the *Musikalisches Opfer* ("Musical offering"), a miscellany of canons, complicated *ricercars* (old-fashioned fugues), and a trio sonata, all based on a weirdly chromatic "royal theme" given Bach as a subject for improvisation by none other than Frederick the Great, the Prussian king, during a visit by Bach in May of 1747 to the Prussian court at Potsdam, where his son Carl Philipp Emanuel was employed. The ultimate "speculative" work, Bach's intended final testament, was *Die Kunst der Fuge* ("The art of fugue"), a collection of twenty-one *contrapuncti*, including canons, double fugues, triple fugues, fugues with answers by augmentation and diminution, inversion, and *cancrizans* ("crab motion," or retrograde), all based on a single D-minor subject.

Bach was working on this collection on the day he died, leaving unfinished the last *Fuga a 3 soggetti*, in which the

musical anagram of his name was to be worked in as a chromatic countersubject (Ex. 7-18). The so-called B–A–C–H cipher has been a potent musical emblem ever since the Art of Fugue was published, in 1751, in an edition supervised by Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, who refrained from finishing the last fugue (as he could easily have done), but let it trail off into a sketch, followed by a note explaining the reason.

It was no accident that the German musicians who created the Bach revival in the early nineteenth century fastened on just these pieces—the Passion oratorios and the encyclopedic, testamentary works. The Passions were the only vocal works by Bach that could find any sort of place in early nineteenth-century secular musical life. Their revival took place within the nineteenth-century German “concert oratorio” movement, something that had nothing to do with Bach or with the Lutheran tradition. Rather, it went back to Handel, or (more accurately) to the London Handelian tradition, both a prime fosterer and a beneficiary of British national sentiment.

As we will later observe in greater musical detail, the Handelian oratorio (the earliest type of oratorio meant expressly for concert performance) had been imported to the German-speaking lands by the Austrian composer Franz Joseph Haydn (1732–1809), who had encountered Handel’s work on a visit to England, been bowled over by it, and emulated it in two oratorios of his own, “The Creation,” first performed in 1798, and “The Seasons” (1801). Like most of Handel’s oratorios, and like the German oratorios that followed them, Haydn’s oratorios were performed in theaters and concert halls, not churches.

By the time Bach’s Passions were revived, the main German venue for oratorio performances had become the music festival, first instituted in 1818. As the critic and historian Cecilia Hopkins Porter has shown, these festivals transformed the German musical establishment and created a new public—the first “mass public”—for music.²² Their other main achievement was the creation of a sense of German national identity through music. It was Bach who provided a focal point for that, as Handel had done in England. (Of course, Handel—or rather, Händel—was “repatriated” and “reclaimed” by the Germans as well, and given back his umlaut, during this period.)

So burgeoning nationalism, perhaps the nineteenth century’s signal contribution to European politics and culture, which had turned Handel into an institution in England a bit ahead of schedule thanks to British “national” precocity, caught up with Bach and turned him into a competing institution just when the familiar institutions of modern concert life were being established.



ex. 7-18a The B-A-C-H cipher

System 1: Treble clef, bass clef. Treble staff has whole notes B, A, C, H. Bass staff has whole notes B, A, C, H. Lyrics: B - A - C - H

System 2: Treble clef, bass clef. Treble staff has eighth notes. Bass staff has eighth notes. Lyrics: - H

System 3: Treble clef, bass clef. Treble staff has eighth notes. Bass staff has eighth notes. Lyrics: B - A - C - H

System 4: Treble clef, bass clef. Treble staff has eighth notes. Bass staff has eighth notes. Lyrics: - H

System 5: Treble clef, bass clef. Treble staff has eighth notes. Bass staff has eighth notes. Lyrics: B - A - C - H

System 1: Treble and bass clefs. Treble clef contains a melodic line with notes G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4. Bass clef contains a rhythmic accompaniment. Lyrics: H - C - A - B

System 2: Treble and bass clefs. Treble clef contains a melodic line with notes B4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4, C4. Bass clef contains a rhythmic accompaniment. Lyrics: B - A - C - H

System 3: Treble and bass clefs. Treble clef contains a melodic line with notes G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4. Bass clef contains a rhythmic accompaniment. Lyrics: H - C - A - B

System 4: Treble and bass clefs. Treble clef contains a melodic line with notes B4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4, C4. Bass clef contains a rhythmic accompaniment. Lyrics: B - A C -

System 5: Treble and bass clefs. Treble clef contains a melodic line with notes G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4. Bass clef contains a rhythmic accompaniment. Lyrics: - H

System 6: Treble and bass clefs. Treble clef contains a melodic line with notes G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4. Bass clef contains a rhythmic accompaniment. No lyrics.

System 7: Treble and bass clefs. Treble clef contains a melodic line with notes G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4. Bass clef contains a rhythmic accompaniment. Lyrics: B - A - C -

System 8: Treble and bass clefs. Treble clef contains a melodic line with notes G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4. Bass clef contains a rhythmic accompaniment. Lyrics: - H

ex. 7-18b B-A-C-H cipher at end of *The Art of Fugue*

The specific nature of German nationalism also favored Bach's canonization. Where the British prided themselves on their commerce and industry, and on their liberal political institutions, the Germans, then lacking political unity, very backward industrially, and economically ruined by the Napoleonic wars, prided themselves on "art and learning," as the composer and critic Carl Kossmaly declared shortly after the Bach revival had got underway. Their nationalism was a nationalism of culture. "In the realm of ideas," Kossmaly averred, "in everything concerning intelligence and spiritual capacity, not only inner unity and national independence but also a decided superiority must be granted to the Germans."²³ In music, Bach was the proof. His profundity and complexity were all of a sudden national treasures; and the abstract musical speculations of his late years became harbingers of "absolute music," the highest of all the arts, where the Germans most vehemently asserted their supremacy.

This appropriation of Bach to the politics of German secular nationalism was already evident in the earliest biography of Bach, by Johann Nikolaus Forkel (1749–1818). This book, which appeared in 1802 (one year after Haydn's *Seasons*), was a landmark: it was not only the first biography of Bach, it was the first full-scale scholarly biography of any composer and one of the earliest books to be recognizably a work of musicology in the modern academic sense. It is dedicated to "patriotic admirers of true musical art." Its preface declares that "Bach's works are a priceless national patrimony; no other nation possesses anything to compare with it."²⁴ And this is its final paragraph:

This man, the greatest orator-poet that ever addressed the world in the language of music, was a German! Let Germany be proud of him! Yes, proud of him, but worthy of him too!²⁵

So modern academic musicology, the tradition out of which (but also, in certain ways, against which) this book is written, originated, like the Bach revival and the musical canon of which Bach is now regarded as the cornerstone, as a by-product of German nationalism.

Notes:

(21) Johann Adolph Scheibe, "Letter from an Able Musikant Abroad" (1737), in David and Mendel, *The Bach Reader*, p. 238.

(22) See Cecelia Hopkins Porter, "The New Public and the Reordering of the Musical Establishment: The Lower Rhine Music festivals, 1818–67," *19th Century Music* III (1979–80): 211–24.

(23) "Musikalische," *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* (19 February 1841), quoted in Cecelia Hopkins Porter, *The Rhine as Musical Metaphor: Cultural Identity in German Romantic Music* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1996), p. 66.

(24) Johann Nikolaus Forkel, *Johann Sebastian Bach: His Life, Art, and Work* (London: Constable and Co., 1920), p. xxv.

(25) *Ibid.*, p. 152

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Johann Sebastian Bach

Passion

CURSED QUESTIONS

Chapter: CHAPTER 7 Class of 1685 (II)

Source: MUSIC IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

Does that matter? More generally, does it matter that Bach's music, little known in his time and forgotten soon after his death, has been called back to active cultural duty by a cultural program unrelated and perhaps alien to it? And does it matter that it is now admired for reasons that may have little to do with what motivated it?

Many lovers of the music will have no trouble answering these questions. Indeed, the Bach revival can seem a miraculous salvage operation, hardly in need of defense or excuse. But the "universalization" of music originally created within a narrowly specific cultural context does entail some difficulties, and cannot help raising some problems, especially if the original context was a religious one.

Look again at Ex. 7-15 and consider it from a different perspective. No mention was made the first time around of the fact that the *turba* in the St. John Passion, following the Book of John itself, is identified not as "*das Volk*" or "the people" (as it is in the Matthew Passion), but as "*die Juden*" or "the Jews." An accusation is being made, one that is no longer supported by responsible historical or theological scholarship, that the Jews rather than the Romans were responsible for Christ's death. That accusation, now often called the "blood libel," has had a bearing on a history of bloody persecutions, culminating in perhaps the most horrible page in the history of the twentieth century.

Obviously, Bach had no part of that. Nor was he, as far as anyone today can guess, personally anti-Semitic as the term is understood today, except insofar as he probably subscribed to Luther's doctrine that the Jews should submit to conversion on pain of punishment. In all likelihood he rarely, possibly never, met a Jew and thought little about them. The St. John Passion was intended for performance before a congregation of Christian believers for whom the Gospel text was ... well, Gospel. The insult it contains to Jews was wholly incidental to its purpose.

But today it serves other purposes and is performed before other audiences. Bach is long dead, but the St. John Passion lives on. Jews not only hear it nowadays, they often participate in performances of it, and are sometimes shocked to learn what it is that they are singing. Are they wrong? Does Bach's music redeem the text? Would it impair Bach's work from the standpoint of its present social use if the text were emended to exclude the blood libel? And if people disagree about the answers to these difficult questions, on what basis can they be adjudicated?

It is no part of the purpose of this book to provide the answers to these questions. But it is integral to its purpose to raise them, for they crystallize important historical problems—problems of appropriation, universalization, recontextualization—that have arisen along with the practice of historiography itself, and that historiography not only poses but in large part creates. Precisely because these problems are part and parcel of historiography's essence and its legacy, historiography often remains blind to them, not regarding itself as a part of its own subject matter. But responsible historiography, most historians now concede, must contain an element of reflexivity—concern with itself as a historical entity and with its own potential cultural and social influence, alongside the entities it purports to study.

The problem of the anti-Semitic message in the St. John Passion, from which some people today may actually "learn" the "fact" that the Jews killed Christ, would never have become a problem had Bach never been revived. What was merely a latent message in Bach's time, stating an accepted truth to which no one would have paid much attention *per se*, has become a potentially explicit message in our time, and a potentially mischievous one. We have history—rather the *sense* of history fostered by romantic nationalism—to thank for that. The peculiarly romantic sense of the timeless relevance of history, called "historicism," is what vouchsafed the work's survival. The problem comes in

deciding just what it is in the treasured legacy of the past that should be regarded as timelessly relevant.

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Domenico Scarlatti

Sonata

SCARLATTI, AT LAST

Chapter: CHAPTER 7 Class of 1685 (II)

Source: MUSIC IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

Bach lived his life in defiance of the Enlightenment and was revived in reaction to it. The remaining member of the class of 1685, Domenico Scarlatti, exemplified the esthetic of Enlightenment better, perhaps, than any other musician of his time.

The son of Alessandro Scarlatti, one of the giants of the opera seria, Domenico Scarlatti was at first groomed for a career in his father's footsteps, for which he showed a precocious aptitude. His first opera, *Ottavia restituita al trono* ("Octavia restored to the throne"), was produced at Saint Bartholomew's in Naples, Alessandro's stamping ground, for the 1703 carnival season, when Domenico was all of seventeen years old. His last, the archetypical *Berenice, regina d'Egitto, ovvero Le gare di amore e di politica* ("Bernice, Queen of Egypt;" or, the "Contest of love and politics"), was produced for the Roman carnival fifteen years later, whereupon Scarlatti retired from the opera stage, at the age of thirty-two, with almost forty years of life still ahead of him.

The next year, 1719, he took a position as *maestro di cappella* at the cathedral of Lisbon, in Portugal, where he produced several oratorios and other sacred vocal works (some in a very chaste *stile antico*), and also supervised the musical education of the Infanta (crown princess) Maria Barbara, a gifted keyboard player. On her marriage to Fernando, the crown prince of Spain, in 1728, he followed Maria Barbara to Madrid, where he was known as Domingo Escarlatti, and served as courtier until his death in 1757, the last twenty years alongside the great castrato Farinelli, who (as we have seen) also retired to a sinecure at Madrid.



fig. 7-8 Domenico Scarlatti, by Domingo Antonio de Velasco.

Scarlatti spent his years at Madrid as a pampered retainer, later a knight, and was free to compose whatever he wanted. What he wanted to compose was virtuoso harpsichord music for himself (and, presumably, his royal pupil) to perform. Unconstrained by any set requirements, yet prompted by a tremendous musical curiosity and imagination, he invented what amounted to a new style of composition, which he called “ingenious jesting with art.”²⁶ The phrase is pregnant. It jibes presciently with Dr. Burney’s comments on the nature and value of music, and reveals a wholehearted commitment to the ideal of delighting—rather than edifying, instructing, awing, or stirring—the listener. Nothing could be farther away from the monumental worlds of Bach and Handel.

Accordingly, Scarlatti became the great miniaturist of his age, spending the last thirty to forty years of his life turning out upwards of 550 short, freestanding compositions for the harpsichord (and, to an undeterminable extent, for other keyboard instruments to which they are adaptable, namely organ, clavichord, and early forms of the pianoforte). These pieces were individually called sonatas, but they were in only a single “movement” and were often published under different names (such as *essercizi*, “studies”), or even as *pièces* grouped in suites. None survives in the composer’s autograph, and it is impossible to know, therefore, exactly what he called them or how he grouped them.

The reason for occasionally calling them *pièces* is clear enough: like those of Couperin and the other French *clavecinistes*, Scarlatti's pieces are uniformly in "binary" form—far more uniformly than Couperin's, which are often *rondeaux* (with recurrent refrains) or *passacailles* (variations over a ground). Scarlatti himself never gathered them into suites. Early copyists and editors liked to group them in pairs, similar in key but contrasting in tempo. This, too, is a practice that (while effective, and widely followed in performance) cannot with any certainty be associated with the composer.

Rather, Scarlatti evidently preferred to provide delight in single short doses—"by the shot," one could say. But unlike Couperin, who also deserves credit for pioneering the single characteristic piece (albeit published in "*ordres*" or suites), Scarlatti liked to make brash statements as well as tender ones. Like any jester, he had an exhibitionistic streak. He could never have said, with Couperin (in the preface to his first book of *pièces de clavecin*, 1713), that "I would rather be moved than astonished." Scarlatti's sonatas, though occasionally tender and lyrical, are, as a *corpus*, the most astonishing pieces of their time.

Their astonishing character draws on several sources. One is the outstanding instrumental virtuosity they require and display (particularly in the use of special effects like crossed hands and even *glissando*). Another is their harmonic extravagance, manifested both in terms of boldly handled dissonance and an often flamboyant, yet exquisitely graded use of modulatory chromaticism. Still another is the fantastic variety with which their single basic shape is treated.

Finally, there is a singular imprint of local color—a local color that to listeners in countries where the international music trade flourished seemed exotic (as it must have seemed to the foreign-born Scarlatti himself, hence his penchant for noticing and drawing on it). The Scarlatti sonatas are a very early instance of exotic local color being sought and valued for its "pure" musical allure, without any symbolically nationalistic overlay. (A century or more later, this allure was exploited nationalistically by Spanish musicians, notably the pianist-composer Enrique Granados, who pioneeringly programmed, edited, and emulated Scarlatti at a time when his work had largely lapsed into "historical" limbo.)

The most remarkable aspect of Scarlatti's sonatas, in fact, may be the absence in them (despite their frequent vivid "pictorialisms") of anything symbolic at all. At a time when music, like the other arts, was mainly valued for its mimetic properties, Scarlatti sought to convey what Thomas Twining, a friend of Dr. Burney, called "a simple original pleasure, ... no more imitative than the smell of a rose, or the flavor of a pineapple."²⁷ In this, Scarlatti was true to the spirit, not of his father, but of the Italian string composers of his father's generation. His sonatas, unlike Couperin's character pieces, were works at which old French academicians like Fontanelle might have railed.

What made them the darlings of connoisseurs and epicures from the beginning—or at least from 1739, when a selection of them was published for the first time and immediately pirated far and wide (as well as plundered by Handel for his "Grand Concertos")—was what their British publisher Thomas Roseingrave, a famous harpsichordist in his own right, called "their Delicacy of Stile, and Masterly Composition."²⁸ The Scarlatti sonatas, from which the following examples have been drawn, were chosen to exemplify all these traits in turn—except sheer virtuosity, which is exemplified throughout. They are numbered here according to the catalogue of Ralph Kirkpatrick (1911–84), an eminent harpsichordist who in his biography of Scarlatti (1953) tried to put the sonatas in something resembling a chronological order. (The previously standard listing by Alessandro Longo had been an arbitrary one like the Bach-Gesellschaft ordering of Bach's cantatas.)

The Sonata in G, K. 105, has an overall shape that can be regarded as typical for Scarlatti: the usual swing from tonic to dominant in the first half, followed by a return in the second half by way of a FOP or "far-out point" (in this case, the cadence on B minor (iii) in mm. 118–19). As is also typical for Scarlatti, the endings of each binary half match up with their counterparts more closely than the beginnings, so that a drive to completion is achieved. What makes the sonata unforgettable, though, is not its general contours but the specific harmonic content, which is also "typically Scarlattian," but in an unusually, almost uniquely concentrated fashion. Beginning half-way through the first half, and even more pervasively in the second half, the harmony is rife with dissonant seconds, few of which can be considered "chord tones," and even fewer of which resolve in normally prescribed fashion to consonances. In mm. 39–41 (the beginning of Ex. 7-19) their actual function is best perceived. The harmony is clearly A major. The Ds in the left hand, however, show no tendency whatever to resolve to C#; instead, they seem to cling to the E in a sort of decorative cluster.

In fact this pungent decoration was widely employed by harpsichordists. Francesco Geminiani, an Italian violinist

who worked in England, called particular attention to it in his *Treatise of Good Taste in the Art of Musick* (1749): “No performer should flatter himself that he is able to accompany well till he is master of this delicate and admirable secret which has been in use above a hundred years.”²⁹ But before Scarlatti it was rarely written down (which was why it was a “secret”). A sort of simultaneous mordent, it was called *acciaccatura* (from *acciaccare*, to bruise or batter). Scarlatti was uniquely drawn to its use and, by notating it, put it “on the map.”

The deliciously grotesque passage shown in Ex. 7-19, where the *acciaccaturas* are maintained throughout like a sort of pedal (or—more to the point—like a constantly strummed open string), discloses the reason for Scarlatti’s seeming obsession with them. By combining the *acciaccaturas* with “Phrygian” neighbor notes (B ♭ applied to A in the first half, E ♭ applied to D in the second), Scarlatti unmistakably conjures up the sound of “Flamenco” guitars, the Andalusian gypsy style that has become pervasive in Spanish popular music, and that must have already been a conspicuous part of the sonic landscape in Scarlatti’s day.



ex. 7-19 Domenico Scarlatti, Sonata in G, K. 105, mm. 39–54

The Sonata in E major, K. 264, is one of Scarlatti’s most vagarious essays in modulation. The first half already contains chords whose roots lie the very maximum distance—namely, a tritone—away from the tonic on a complete (rather than diatonically adjusted) circle of fifths. The second half begins with a remarkable excursion (Ex. 7-20) in which the traditional FOP seems to be pushed much farther than ever before, requiring an enharmonic alteration of the key signature to avoid a huge proliferation of double (or even triple) sharps. The harmonic distance covered in Ex. 7-20, though covered very unconventionally (by a sequence of three successive ascending whole steps adding up to another tritone: B–C# [= D ♭]–E ♭ –F), turns out to be not all that great; the cadence point at the end of the example is C, merely the “minor vi” or “flat submediant” of E (that is, the submediant of the parallel minor), and though played around with at length, it is never exceeded. Far more significant, perhaps, is the fact that the strange modulation is carried by a melodic sequence drawn from the sonata’s opening pair of measures, so that it could be regarded as a motivic development.

ex. 7-20 Domenico Scarlatti, Sonata in E major, K. 264, mm. 127–46

The “perhaps” is necessary, because a modulatory motivic development at the beginning of the second binary half, culminating in the FOP, was something that would later become a virtual *sine qua non* or mandate for “classical” sonata composers; but it happens only *ad libitum* (“when he pleases”) with Scarlatti. For him it is only one of many ways of proceeding, and a rather exceptional one at that. Its “significance” is something that we judge, inevitably, with a hindsight the composer did not possess.

The same goes for the overall shape of the Sonata in F minor, K. 481, a plaintive *andante cantabile*, in which the beginning of the second half features another bold enharmonic modulation over a motive derived from the first half (compare Ex. 7-21a with Ex. 7-21b), again arriving at a bizarre FOP that is the exact reciprocal of the one in the previous sonata. Instead of the submediant of a major tonic’s parallel minor, we have the submediant of a minor tonic’s parallel major.

ex. 7-21a Domenico Scarlatti, Sonata in F minor, K. 481, mm. 9–12



ex. 7-21b Domenico Scarlatti, Sonata in F minor, K. 481, mm. 36–44

But there is something else to notice. In this sonata, the return of the original tonic happens to coincide with a return of the opening thematic material. This dramatic “double return” (original key arriving together with the original theme) was something else that would become practically *de rigueur* by the last quarter of the eighteenth century, and a defining attribute of the “classical” sonata form. The double return is often thought typical of Scarlatti, because the most famous Scarlatti sonata of all—C major, K. 159, a favorite of piano teachers everywhere (Ex. 7-22)—happens to have one (compare the beginning with m. 43).

But the double return is actually a great rarity in Scarlatti’s work. If we take an exclusively “horizontal” or synchronic view of his output (that is, comparing it only to what was going on in its own time), the double return will seem an insignificant caprice, even an eccentricity. If, on the other hand, we take a “vertical” or diachronic view (comparing it to what came before and after), it will appear momentarily significant, even prophetic. Which view is the true view?



ex. 7-22a Domenico Scarlatti, Sonata in C, K. 159, mm. 1–6



ex. 7-22b Domenico Scarlatti, Sonata in C, K. 159, mm. 38–47

Obviously, it is a question of perspective. Both are true views, but neither is *the* true view. To Scarlatti’s contemporaries, his sonatas, while much admired by connoisseurs, were admired as “original and happy freaks,”³⁰ to quote Dr. Burney—the offbeat products of an imaginative but isolated and pampered genius. (It was no doubt the self-indulgent quality of his work that gave rise to the rumor, contradicted at last by recently discovered portraits, that in his late years Scarlatti became too fat to reach the keyboard when seated.) As Ralph Kirkpatrick put it, a composer as fertile, as prolific, and as nonchalant as Scarlatti “would have been perfectly capable of discovering the classical sonata form and then throwing it away.”³¹ And yet to many other modern historians and performers, Scarlatti’s harmonic and formal experiments have made him seem no mere eccentric, but “an epoch-making composer,”³² to quote Fernando Valenti (1926–90), an eminent harpsichordist who did a great deal to popularize Scarlatti’s work. According to this view, Scarlatti was a more “advanced” composer than Bach or Handel, his fellows in the class of 1685. There are facts that may be cited to justify such a view. The most persuasive one, paradoxically enough, would be Scarlatti’s retarded development.

Surely one of the latest bloomers among the major names in music history, Scarlatti only came into his own as a composer in 1738, with the publication of his first book, *Essercizi per gravicembalo*. By then the class of 1685 were all aged fifty-three, and Bach’s and Handel’s careers were largely behind them. Scarlatti was just beginning to be “Scarlatti,” and thus his effective starting point coincided with Bach’s and Handel’s finish lines. As a composer, then, Scarlatti might better be regarded not as a contemporary of J. S. Bach but rather as an elder member of the generation of Bach’s sons.

Such a view of Scarlatti, of course, reflects a general historical view that places the highest premium on teleological evolution, and on innovation, evolution’s handmaiden. It is known as the “Darwinian” theory of history, after a fundamental misreading of the work of Charles Darwin, the biologist whose (entirely non-teleological) theory of evolution has dominated natural history since 1859, the year in which his masterwork, *The Origin of Species*, was published. By then, of course, the members of the class of 1685 had all been dead a hundred years or more. It is clearly anachronistic from the point of view of Scarlatti and his contemporaries. Does that make it an altogether irrelevant criterion of judgment?

Many historians and musicians in the twentieth century have not thought so. The Darwinian view of music history was given a memorable expression by Igor Stravinsky, a highly innovative modern composer, when commenting on

an extravagantly Darwinian historical study by Edward Lowinsky called *Tonality and Atonality in Sixteenth-Century Music*. Lowinsky had contended that if a historian can show a trend or an accomplishment, no matter how small or how isolated, to have been “pregnant with the seed of future developments,” then “it does not seem a matter of decisive importance whether it represents, say ten, fifteen, or twenty per cent” of the total musical output its time.³³ “Or, indeed, a smaller per cent still,” Stravinsky enthusiastically chimed in, perhaps recalling the recent history of Russia, his native country, and the “Three Who Made a Revolution” (to cite the title of an influential study of Lenin, Stalin, and Trotsky by Bertram D. Wolfe).³⁴

In back of an apparently scientific view, then, is a more general cultural assumption that significant history is the creation of small elites. When it is put in this way, the political implications (or foundations) of the view are more easily noticed. Exclusively diachronic views of historical phenomena, and the concomitant tendency to overrate innovation, have lost some ground as a result. But an exclusively synchronic view may tend to overrate eccentricity and obscure the reality of “trends and accomplishments.” Again, it is more important for us right now to understand the question than it is to adjudicate it. Rather than attempt to decide the matter of Scarlatti’s “true” significance or to harmonize the vividly conflicting perspectives on his achievement, we can regard him as an archetype of “peripheral” composers—composers who are geographically and temperamentally remote from the centers of institutional and commercial music making, but (perhaps seemingly, perhaps truly) “ahead of their time.” Whether “seemingly” or “truly” depends on the manner in which the times make contact with the individual, and (inevitably) on the interests and biases of the historian.

Notes:

(26) Domenico Scarlatti, Preface to *Essercizi per gravicembalo* (London, 1738); quoted in Ralph Kirkpatrick, *Domenico Scarlatti* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), p. 102.

(27) Thomas Twining, *Aristotle’s Treatise on Poetry, Translated: With Notes on the Translation, and on the Original; And Two Dissertations, on Poetical, and Musical, Imitation* (2nd ed., London, 1812), p. 66.

(28) Title page of *XLII Suites de Pieces Pour le Clavecin. En deux Volumes. Composées par Domenico Scarlatti...Carefully Revised & Corrected from the Errors of the Press [by] Thos. Roseingrave* (London: B. Cooke, [1739]).

(29) Francesco Geminiani, *Treatise of Good Taste in the Art of Musick* (London, 1749), p. 4.

(30) Burney, *A General History of Music*, ed., F. Mercer, Vol. II, p. 706.

(31) Ralph Kirkpatrick, *Domenico Scarlatti*, p. 266.

(32) Fernando Valenti, liner note to Domenico Scarlatti, *Sonatas for Harpsichord* (Westminster Records, 1952).

(33) Edward E. Lowinsky, *Tonality and Atonality in Sixteenth-Century Music* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1962), p. 74.

(34) Igor Stravinsky, Foreword to Lowinsky, *Tonality and Atonality*, p. viii.

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Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

CHAPTER 8 The Comic Style

Mid-Eighteenth-century Stylistic Change Traced to Its Sources in the 1720s; *Empfindsamkeit*, *Galanterie*; “War of the Buffoons”

Chapter: CHAPTER 8 The Comic Style

Source: MUSIC IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

YOU CAN'T GET THERE FROM HERE

“Bach is the father, we are the kids” (*Bach ist der Vater, wir sind die Buben*), Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was once quoted, perhaps apocryphally, as saying.¹ Only it was not J. S. Bach of whom he said it. “Old Sebastian,” as Mozart called him, was just a dimly remembered grandfather until the last decade of Mozart’s career, when (slightly in advance of the public revival described in the previous chapter) Mozart first got to hear the works of J. S. Bach and G. F. Handel, then virtually unperformed outside of the composers’ home territory—northern Germany in the case of Bach and Great Britain in the case of Handel. It was at the home of Baron Gottfried van Swieten, a Dutch-born Viennese aristocrat who maintained a sort of antiquarian salon, that Mozart made their acquaintance. The baron commissioned from Mozart modernized scores of Handel’s *Messiah* and other vocal works for performance at his soirées. Although the works of Handel and Bach made a big impression on the van Swieten circle, the very fact that they needed to be updated for performance in the 1780s shows how far their works had fallen out of the practical repertoire.

The Bach whom Mozart regarded as a musical parent was old Sebastian’s second son, Carl Philipp Emanuel (1714–88), who was indeed old enough to be Mozart’s father (or even his grandfather), and who along with his much younger half-brother Johann Christian (1735–82) was indeed regarded by the musicians of the late eighteenth century as a founding father. Their eminence has much receded, though, owing to the historical circumstances that attended the rise of the modern “classical” repertory and the writing of its history. That modern repertory (we still call it “standard”) began with the works of Mozart himself and his contemporaries, notably Franz Joseph Haydn. When J. S. Bach was revived in the nineteenth century, he was appended to an already-established “canon” of works and, along with Handel, was proclaimed its founding father. The work of his sons, however, was not revived.



fig. 8-1 Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, J. S. Bach’s second son, master of the *empfindsamer Stil* and author of the *Essay on the True Art of Keyboard Playing*.

The false genealogy thus implied, in which the generation of Bach and Handel was cast in a direct line that led straight to the generation of Haydn and Mozart, was responsible for a host of false historical assumptions. Because of them, the interest and attention of historians was diverted away from the music and the musical life of the mid-eighteenth century, when the Bach sons, along with the later composers of *opera seria* (with whom we are already somewhat familiar from chapter 4) were at their height of activity and prestige. The result has been something of a historiographical black hole. The earliest attempts to plug it amounted to assertions and counterassertions that this or that repertory formed the “missing link” between the Bach–Handel and Haydn–Mozart poles. First came Hugo Riemann (1849–1919), a great German scholar who identified a once-famous but chimerical “Mannheim School” as “the so-long-sought predecessor of Haydn.”² The Italian musicologist Fausto Torrefranca (1883–1955) found the missing link in Italian keyboard sonatas;³ the Viennese Wilhelm Fischer (1886–1962) found it in the Viennese orchestral style; and so it went.⁴

Finally, in 1969, the American music historian Daniel Heartz blew the whistle on the game in an explosive four-page wake-up call of an article (“Approaching a History of 18th-Century Music”), and made the first comprehensive attempt at a new historiography in a magisterial eight-hundred-page book published twenty-six years later (*Haydn*,

Mozart and the Viennese School: 1740–1780).⁵ Hertz accounted for the notorious void by noting the fact—which many at the time found maddening to acknowledge—that the historiography of eighteenth-century music “has been done largely by, for, and about Germans.”⁶ But as he went right on to point out in a truly delicious passage, the Germanic historiography has affected everyone who conceives the history of eighteenth-century music in terms of the modern canon and its masters. The death of Bach in 1750, which seems so dramatically (and conveniently) to split the century into its early and late phases, Hertz observed,

has a sentimental meaning for all music lovers today. It meant nothing at the time. For all that the Leipzig master participated upon the European musical scene of his day he might as well have died a generation earlier. He did not take the extra step that made [the opera seria composer Johann Adolf] Hasse the darling of Dresden and of Europe...and thank God for that! With Handel the case is different. Had he remained in the North we should probably honor him now no more than we do a hundred other Lutheran worthies. Italy coaxed him beyond his originally turgid and unvocal mannerisms. Had he remained to bask in Southern climes he might have joined the Neapolitan thrust into the mainstream of 18th-century music. But he went instead to Augustan England. There, musical backwater though it was, he found himself in a land that led the world with regard to the freedom and dignity of the human spirit. To England, then, we owe thanks that Handel became one of the greatest of all masters. At the same time it should be borne in mind that Handel in London stood aside from the main evolution nearly as much as Bach.

We tend nowadays to recoil a bit from phrases like “mainstream” and “main evolution,” seeing in them the likely pitfall of substituting one sort of blinkered or biased view for another. Evolutions are only “main” to the extent that their outcomes are valued. Hertz’s “main evolution” is so described because of where it led—namely, to Haydn and Mozart. Meanwhile, the fact that Bach and Handel have returned to the canon in glory, and have exerted a potent influence on composers ever since their return, shows that the evolution from which they stood apart was not permanently or irrevocably “main.” “Main-ness,” in short is not something inherent in a phenomenon but something ascribed to it—inevitably in hindsight, and for a reason. But whether or not we wish to promote the slighted evolutionary line in this way, its reality must be accepted and coped with. Otherwise we have no history, if (to quote Hertz once more) history is an attempt “to seek the interconnection between events.”

So in this chapter we will try to fill in the picture a bit, although the full story is still far from tellable. No period is in greater need of fundamental research than the period that extended from the 1730s to the 1760s: the period, in other words, in which the composers born in the first two decades of the century dominated the contemporary scene. That period, long commonly known as “Preclassic” (and thus relegated by its very name to a status of relative insignificance, a sort of trough between peaks), has been until recently the most systematically neglected span of years in the whole history of European “fine-art” music.

Notes:

- (1) First reported (or invented) in Friedrich Rochlitz, “Karl Philipp Emmanuel Bach,” *Für Freunde der Tonkunst*, Vol. IV (1832), p. 308.
- (2) See H. Riemann, Introduction to *Sinfonien der pfalz-bayerischen Schule*, Denkmäler der Tonkunst in Bayern, Vol. IV, Jahrgang iii/1 (1902).
- (3) See F. Torrefranca, *Le origini italiane del romanticismo musicale: I primitivi della sonata moderna* (Turin, 1930).
- (4) See W. Fischer, *Wiener Instrumentalmusik vor und um 1750*, Vol. II, Denkmäler der Tonkunst in Österreich, Vol. XXXIX, Jahrgang xix/2 (1912).
- (5) Daniel Hertz, *Haydn, Mozart and the Viennese School: 1740–1780* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1995); eight years later Hertz published a thousand-page sequel, *Music in European Capitals: The Galant Style, 1720–1780* (New York: Norton, 2003).
- (6) Daniel Hertz, “Approaching a History of Eighteenth-Century Music,” *Current Musicology* 9 (1969): 92–93.

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Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

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Bach family

Wilhelm Friedemann Bach

Galant

THE YOUNGER BACHS

Chapter: CHAPTER 8 The Comic Style

Source: MUSIC IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

One very dramatic way of pointing up the problem and suggesting solutions to it (even though it means staying for a while with the Germans) would be to begin with a close look at the work of Bach's sons, starting with the eldest, Wilhelm Friedemann (1710–84).



fig. 8-2 Wilhelm Friedemann Bach, eldest son of J. S. Bach, who followed in his father's footsteps as a North German church organist.

We last heard of him as the arranger of his father's huge Reformation cantata for a gala performance on the anniversary of the Augsburg Confession. Thereafter, W. F. Bach (henceforth "WF") followed a career in his father's footsteps as Lutheran organist and cantor. Although far less successful than old Sebastian's in terms of steady employment, owing to what we would probably now diagnose as personality disorders, it was by no means an undistinguished career. WF's most prominent job, and the one he held longest, was as successor to Zachow, Handel's teacher, at the Liebfrauenkirche (Church of the Virgin Mary) in Halle, Handel's birthplace. And despite his career difficulties, WF inherited his father's reputation as the finest German church organist of his time.

It would be reasonable to expect his music basically to resemble old Sebastian's. Some of it, notably his church cantatas, did. And yet as the harpsichord sonata in F (Ex. 8-1) suggests, much more of it does not.

Although composed around 1745, that is to say within J. S. Bach's lifetime, the work occupies a different stylistic universe than anything the elder Bach composed. The very word "sonata" had come to mean something different to WF from what it meant to JS. For JS the word meant chamber music in the Italian style—basically trio sonatas, not keyboard works at all. For keyboard one wrote suites, not sonatas. The only exceptions were keyboard arrangements of chamber sonatas (like the one by Reincken we looked at in chapter 6), or else deliberate imitations of such works, like the set of six sonatas for organ composed in Leipzig around 1727, in which the two hands of the organist represent the two "melodic" parts of a trio sonata and the feet on the pedals played the very active and thematic bass. (The organ trios were thus pedal studies in effect; they were actually composed for WF to practice.) Even JS's sonatas for solo instrument and harpsichord were usually trio sonatas, thanks to obbligato writing for the keyboard. The most common formal approach in all of these works, especially in the outer (fast) movements, was to spin them out in fugal style.

JS never dreamt of writing keyboard sonatas like WF's (not just the one given here, but all of them), in which all three movements were in binary form and in which the texture is either two-part or else makes free use of harmonic figuration. But these large formal and textural differences, though significant, are really the least of it. The stylistic and rhetorical gulf is the mind-boggler, and it widens with each movement.

At first blush WF's first movement does not look all that "un-Bachlike." It actually begins with a canon. That canon, though, lasts all of two measures, and contains a repeated phrase that turns it into mere "voice exchange." Imitative counterpoint, though clearly something at WF's beck and call, is for him an occasional device, more a decorative touch than the essential *modus operandi*. But even that is not the most basic difference of approach between WF and his father. The most basic differences lie in the interpenetrating dimensions of melodic design and harmonic rhythm.

Un poco allegro

1. 2.

Measures 19-21 of a musical score. The system consists of a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. Measure 19 starts with a treble clef staff containing a quarter note G4, an eighth note A4, and a quarter note B4, followed by a quarter rest. The bass clef staff contains a quarter note G3, an eighth note A3, and a quarter note B3. Measure 20 continues with similar rhythmic patterns. Measure 21 ends with a quarter rest in the treble staff and a quarter note G3 in the bass staff.

Measures 22-24 of a musical score. Measure 22 features a treble clef staff with a quarter note G4, an eighth note A4, and a quarter note B4, followed by a quarter rest. The bass clef staff contains a quarter note G3, an eighth note A3, and a quarter note B3. Measure 23 continues with similar rhythmic patterns. Measure 24 ends with a quarter rest in the treble staff and a quarter note G3 in the bass staff. A *cresc.* marking is present above the treble staff in measure 24.

Measures 25-27 of a musical score. Measure 25 features a treble clef staff with a quarter note G4, an eighth note A4, and a quarter note B4, followed by a quarter rest. The bass clef staff contains a quarter note G3, an eighth note A3, and a quarter note B3. Measure 26 continues with similar rhythmic patterns. Measure 27 ends with a quarter rest in the treble staff and a quarter note G3 in the bass staff. A *f* marking is present above the treble staff in measure 27.

Measures 28-30 of a musical score. Measure 28 features a treble clef staff with a quarter note G4, an eighth note A4, and a quarter note B4, followed by a quarter rest. The bass clef staff contains a quarter note G3, an eighth note A3, and a quarter note B3. Measure 29 continues with similar rhythmic patterns. Measure 30 ends with a quarter rest in the treble staff and a quarter note G3 in the bass staff. A *p* marking is present above the treble staff in measure 29.

Measures 31-33 of a musical score. Measure 31 features a treble clef staff with a quarter note G4, an eighth note A4, and a quarter note B4, followed by a quarter rest. The bass clef staff contains a quarter note G3, an eighth note A3, and a quarter note B3. Measure 32 continues with similar rhythmic patterns. Measure 33 ends with a quarter rest in the treble staff and a quarter note G3 in the bass staff. A *f* marking is present above the treble staff in measure 31.

Measures 34-36 of a musical score. Measure 34 features a treble clef staff with a quarter note G4, an eighth note A4, and a quarter note B4, followed by a quarter rest. The bass clef staff contains a quarter note G3, an eighth note A3, and a quarter note B3. Measure 35 continues with similar rhythmic patterns. Measure 36 ends with a quarter rest in the treble staff and a quarter note G3 in the bass staff. A *f* marking is present above the treble staff in measure 34.

Measures 37-39 of a musical score. Measure 37 features a treble clef staff with a quarter note G4, an eighth note A4, and a quarter note B4, followed by a quarter rest. The bass clef staff contains a quarter note G3, an eighth note A3, and a quarter note B3. Measure 38 continues with similar rhythmic patterns. Measure 39 ends with a quarter rest in the treble staff and a quarter note G3 in the bass staff.

ex. 8-1 W. F. Bach, Sonata in F (Falck catalogue no. 6), first movement

WF's melodic design, at the opposite pole from JS's powerfully spinning engine, is based on the dual principle of short-range contrast and balance. The first four measures tell the whole story. Both melodically and harmonically, they divide in the middle, two plus two. The first pair (our "canon") continually circles around the tonic, touching down on it at every second beat. The second pair of measures does the same with the dominant harmony and underscores the harmonic contrast with a motivic one. Melodically, the second pair has nothing to do with the first. But the contrast is forged into a sort of higher unity by the principle of balance when the tonic is restored in m. 5.

Melodic contrast then seems to run rampant. The fifth measure has a new motive (based on the opening rhythm in m. 1), and so does the sixth (no longer related to anything previous), *and so does the seventh!* These little melodic cells qualify as "motives" through independent repetition: in m. 5 directly in the right hand, in m. 6 by a twofold exchange between the hands, and in m. 7 by a single exchange; from this perspective, too, variety seems at first to know no bounds. Measure 8 continues with the same motive as m. 7, which once again creates a symmetrical divide (that is, a divide at the middle); measures 5–8 break down into (1 + 1) + 2.

Parenthetically, let us also note that these motives are cast in rhythms that carry definite associations to the "galant"—the "affable" (lightweight, courtly, "Frenchy") style that JS Bach tended to shy away from, even in the actual *galanteries* (the "modern" dances) from his suites. The fast triplets alternating freely with duple divisions are

one specifically galant rhythm (exploited somewhat ironically by JS, we may recall, in the Fifth Brandenburg Concerto with its most ungallant juggernaut of a harpsichord solo). The “lombard” rhythms (quick short–long pairs) are even more distinctly galant, and even rarer in the work of Bach the father.

But all the surface variety and decorative dazzle in WF’s writing is a feint that covers, and somewhat occludes, a very deliberate and structurally symmetrical tonal plan. Like any binary movement, this one will follow a there-and-back harmonic course, moving from tonic to dominant in the first half and from dominant to tonic, by way of a “far-out point” (FOP), in the second. What distinguishes one piece from another is not the foreordained basic plan they all share but rather the specific means of its implementation. Some pieces rush headlong from harmonic pole to pole. This one, to a degree we have never before encountered in instrumental music, takes time to smell the daisies (and, in the form of unpredictably varied motives, takes care to provide a lot of daisies to smell). That placidity is also part and parcel of what it meant to be galant. It’s a bad courtier or diplomat who’ll allow strong emotion to show.

A stroll around a garden, then—and a very meticulously laid out garden it is. Taking in the first half at a glance now, we count sixteen measures—and it’s no accident. It means that the portion we have examined so far, exactly half of the total span, will be balanced by the rest, so that our observations about short-range harmonic and melodic symmetries will hold at the long range as well: $16 = (8 + 8) = (4 + 4 + 4 + 4)$, and so on down to pairs and units. The longest-range symmetry governing this half of the movement concerns harmonic balance. The establishment of the dominant as local tonic, or modulatory goal, takes place exactly on the downbeat of m. 9 and is repeatedly confirmed thereafter, thus dividing the whole span into 8 bars of tonic, 8 of dominant. Within the second 8 (that is, mm. 9–16), the motivic contrasts take place in a fashion that continues to emphasize symmetrical divisions on various levels simultaneously. Thus m. 9 introduces syncopes; m. 10 has exchanges of triplets between the hands; mm. 11–12 coalesce into one exchange of triplets and larger syncopes; mm. 13–14 feature a twofold exchange of motives; m. 15 has a single exchange, and m. 16 provides the cadence. Thus in summary we get $(1 + 1) + 2 + 2 + (1 + 1)$, which adds a kind of palindromic symmetry to the mix. The ideal, far from the “Baroque” aim of generating a great motivic and tonal momentum, seems to be to provide a maximum of ingratiating detail over a satisfyingly stable ground plan.

The second half starts off like a palindrome or mirror reflection of the first. Its first four measures (mm. 17–20) are a simple transposition to the dominant of the four-measure gambit that got the whole piece moving, and that we analyzed in some detail above. In m. 21, however, we hit a big jolt, expressed at once in every possible dimension—harmonic, textural, melodic. The harmony is a diminished-seventh chord, the most dissonant chord (as opposed to contrapuntal or “non-harmonic” dissonance) in the vocabulary of the time. The texture is disrupted by it: in fact this is the first actual chord we have heard in what up to now has been a strictly two-part texture, one that implied its harmonies rather than stating them outright. Melodically, too, there is disruption: obsessive (or constrained) syncopated repetition of single tones and dissonant leaps rather than smooth melodic flow. (And there is disruption in phrase length, too, as we shall see.)

In a way this is not unexpected, since it is time to move out to the FOP. But never yet have we seen the move so dramatized. The diminished-seventh at m. 21 is built over the leading tone of vi (d minor); and when resolution is made, the opening motive, familiar from both halves of the piece, returns, only to be brusquely shunted aside by a new diminished-seventh disruption on the third beat of m. 24. This is a far more serious disruption, because it is built over D \sharp , the leading tone to E, which is the seventh degree of the scale, and the only pitch in the scale of F major that cannot function as a local tonic because it takes a diminished triad. Therefore, when resolution is made to E major in m. 26, there can be no sense of stable arrival, even at a FOP, because the harmony still contains a chromatic tone and expresses no function within the original key.

Harmonic restlessness continues through an asymmetrical (because binarily indivisible) five measures—during which, with a single exception (find it!), every degree of the chromatic scale is sounded—before settling down on A minor (iii), the true FOP. At this point, stable thematic material is resumed for two measures—literally resumed at the very point at which it had been interrupted (compare mm. 31–32 with mm. 5–6)—only to be superseded by another five bars’ restless modulation, aggravated this time by quickened syncopes, during which every degree of the chromatic scale is sounded without exception.

This last, extraordinarily chromatic, modulatory passage lets us off in m. 38 within hailing distance of the tonic—on IV, which proceeds to V, thence home. Again the return of stable harmonic functions is signaled, or accompanied, by the return of stable thematic material. The “retransitional” bar, the one that zeroes in on the tonic, brings back the “lombard” motives first heard in m. 7. When the tonic is reached in m. 39, however, the original melodic opening abruptly supersedes the lombards. This is the “double return”—original key and original theme simultaneously.

reached with mutually reinforcing or “synergistic” effect—that we first encountered, but only as an anomaly, in Domenico Scarlatti. Two bars later, in m. 41, the whole section originally cast in the dominant (mm. 7–16) returns transposed to the tonic and finishes the piece off with a sense of restored balance and fully achieved harmonic reciprocity.

In the music of W. F. Bach and his contemporaries, the double return and the large-scale melodic-recapitulation-cum-harmonic-reciprocation that it introduces are no longer anomalous features, as they had been with Scarlatti. They have become standard. Whereas Scarlatti’s use of it created a little historiographical problem (what, precisely, was its relationship—or his—to the “main evolution?”), there is no question of its absolute centrality to the musical thinking of WF’s generation and the ones that followed. Indeed, it would not be much of an exaggeration to dub the whole later eighteenth century the Age of the Double Return, so definitive did the gesture become.

The last movement of the present sonata, a rollicking Presto, offers immediate confirmation. Although it contrasts with the first movement in mood and texture, it follows the very same formal model and achieves the very same sense of roundedness and stability. Practically the whole of the first section of the piece is recapitulated in the second half. The first six measures are actually restated twice: at the very beginning of the second half, where they are transposed to the dominant, and towards the end, where they provide the double return. The middle movement (Ex. 8-2), a minuet (or a pair of minuets to be exact), is a simple *galanterie* such as J. S. Bach might have included in a suite. Simpler, in fact: JS would never have settled for such an uncomplicated texture, or for so much artless alternation of tonics and dominants, bar by bar, such as one finds here (especially at the beginning of the second minuet or “trio”). Yet we sense that WF is not “settling” for anything, but using the simplicity and “naturalness” of the unaffected dance as a foil for the very sophisticated constructions in the outer movements.

Minuetto

f

9

17 **Trio**

p

23

30

1. || 2.

Minuetto da capo

ex. 8-2 W. F. Bach, Sonata in F (Falek catalogue no. 6), second movement (Minuet and Trio)

By the use of this foil, the composer points up that very sophistication by reminding us that all the movements in his sonata are cast in what is basically the same form, and also showing us how much variety of surface detail and structural elaboration that basic form can accommodate. The outer movements, with their tremendous profusion of motives, their cunningly calculated harmonic jolts, and their dramatically articulated unfoldings, are teased-up versions of the old *galanterie*, set on either side of a basic version that provides a moment of repose.

But where did all these teasing-up devices come from? And where did WF learn them, if he did not learn them at home? Every distinctive feature of the son's style—its melodic profligacy, its reliance on the contrast and balance of short ideas, its frequent cadences, its self-dramatizing form, its synergistic harnessing of melodic and harmonic events, even its characteristic melodic and harmonic rhythms—were absolutely antithetical to his father's style, and to Handel's as well. To see this style surfacing all at once in Germany explains nothing; it merely makes the problem more acute. Its apparent suddenness is but the result of our skewed perspective on it—our skewed Germanocentric perspective, as Hertz might wish to warn us.

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Empfindsamkeit

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Fantasia

SENSIBILITY

Chapter: CHAPTER 8 The Comic Style

Source: MUSIC IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

Before trying to solve the problem, let's savor it for a while by making it "worse." We can expand the scope of our comparison by noting that the new "teasing" techniques not only created a stylistic contrast with the old but an esthetic and psychological one as well. A composition by J. S. Bach or one of his contemporaries was nothing if not musically unified. There is usually one main *inventio* or musical idea, whether (depending on the genre) we call it "subject," "ritornello," or by some other name, and its purpose is to project, through consistently worked out musical "figures" or motives, a single dominant affect or feeling-state, writ very large indeed.

The melodic surface of WF's sonata, as we have seen, presents not a unified but a highly nuanced, variegated, even fragmented, exterior. The many short-term contrasts, and their implicit importance, seem to undermine the very foundations of his father's style in both its musical and its expressive dimensions. In contrast to the inexorable consistency of JS's "spinning-out," the only predictable aspect of WF's melodic unfolding is its unpredictability. In place of a heroic affect, "objectively" displayed, there is consciousness of subjective caprice, of impressionability, of quick, spontaneous responsiveness or changeability of mood—in a word, of "sensibility," as eighteenth-century writers (most famously, Jane Austen) used the word.

The German equivalent of sensibility, in this sense, was *Empfindung*, meaning the thing itself, or *Empfindsamkeit*, meaning susceptibility to it. It was a new esthetic, which aimed not at objective depiction of a character's feelings, as in an opera, but at the expression and transmission of one's own; and, being based on introspection, it was "realistic" in the sense that it recognized the skittishness and fluidity of subjective feeling. "The rapidity with which the emotions change is common knowledge, for they are nothing but motion and restlessness," wrote the Berlin composer Friedrich Wilhelm Marpurg (1718–95) in a famous treatise on music criticism.⁷

Yet while that rapidity was presumably as well known to the composers of theatrical and ecclesiastical music as it was to anyone else, it was not thought by them to be the most appropriate aspect of the emotions for musical imitation. Rather, they sought to isolate, magnify, and "objectify" the idealized moods of gods, heroes, or contemplative Christian souls at superhuman intensity, and use that objective magnification as the basis for creating monumental musical structures that would impress large audiences in theaters and churches. Composers of the *empfindsamer Stil*, composing on a much smaller scale for intimate domestic surroundings, sought to capture the way "real people" really felt. They sought to create an impression of self-portraiture in which the player (and purchaser) of their music would recognize a corresponding self-portrait.

The origins of artistic "sensibility" were literary. Its first great conscious exponent was the poet Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock (1724–1803), who established the style with his odes (love poems) in the 1740s, and who lived in Hamburg beginning in 1770. The Hamburg connection is important to us because Klopstock's neighbor there was Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach (henceforth "CPE"), who in 1768 assumed the post of cantor at the so-called Johanneum (Church of St. John) after almost thirty years of service to the court of Frederick the Great, the King of Prussia, in Berlin and at the other royal residences. He and Klopstock were kindred spirits and quickly became friends. CPE set Klopstock's odes to music and carried on a lively and sympathetic correspondence with him about the relationship of music and poetry. He was in effect a musical Klopstock and the chief representative in his own medium of artistic *Empfindsamkeit*. The term is now firmly, if retrospectively, associated with him, and with his keyboard music in

particular. He took to an extreme the kind of wordless “expressionism” we have already noted in the work of his elder brother.

He did it quite consciously and even wrote about it (though without using the actual E-word) in his famous treatise, *An Essay on the True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments* (*Versuch über die wahre Art das Clavier zu spielen*), published in Berlin in two volumes (1753, 1762). (It was to this book that Mozart was supposedly paying tribute in the comment quoted at the beginning of this chapter.) CPE’s *Essay* is of course full of technical information—about ornamentation, for example, and continuo realization—that is of great value to the historian of performance practice. But it also deals in less tangible matters, and that is what was new about it.

“Play from the soul,” CPE exhorted his readers, “not like a trained bird!”⁸ And then, lending his novel idea authority by casting it as a paraphrase of a famous maxim by the Roman poet Horace:

Since a musician cannot move others unless he himself is moved, he must of necessity feel all of the affects that he hopes to arouse in his listeners. He communicates his own feelings to them and thus most effectively moves them to sympathy. In languishing, sad passages, the performer must languish and grow sad.... Similarly, in lively, joyous passages, the executant must again put himself into the appropriate mood. And so, constantly varying the passions he will barely quiet one before he rouses another.⁹



fig. 8-3 Frederick the Great performing as flute soloist (probably in his own concerto) at a soirée in Sans Souci, his pleasure palace at Potsdam. His music master, Johann Joachim Quantz, watches from the left foreground. C. P. E. Bach is at the keyboard; leading the violins is Franticek Benda, a member of a large family of distinguished Bohemian musicians active in Germany, who spent fifty-three years in Frederick’s service. Oil painting (1852) by Adolf Friedrich Erdmann von Menzel.

Although the author takes the point for granted, it is important for us to realize that he is describing not only a style of performance but a style of composition as well. The kind of mercurial changeability of mood he emphasizes, and the impetuous sincerity he demands of the player, would both be out of place in a work by his father or in a formalized aria by Handel. For practical examples of musical *Empfindsamkeit* we must turn to CPE’s own works, like the Sonata in F (Ex. 8-3), chosen for the sake of its outward similarity to WF’s sonata in the same key.

Poco allegro

ex. 8-3a C. P. E. Bach, “Prussian” Sonata no. 1 in F (Wotquenne catalogue no. 48/1), first movement, mm. 1–4, 32–37

Andante **Recit.**

ex. 8-3b C. P. E. Bach, “Prussian” Sonata no. 1 in F (Wotquenne catalogue no. 48/1), second movement

This sonata is the first in a set of six, composed in Berlin between 1740 and 1742, as much as a decade before the death of J. S. Bach, and published with a dedication to Frederick the Great, for which reason they are called the “Prussian” sonatas. In style and texture the first movement is even simpler than WF’s sonata and even more mercurial. The second half, for example, does not begin with a direct reference to the opening material but rather a fascinatingly oblique one. The first measure is a kind of free inversion of its counterpart; the left hand enters the way it did in the first half, but there is a new countermelody above it in the right, and so on (Ex. 8-3a). Thus when the double return comes, it is the first time the opening melody has been heard in anything like its original form since the beginning of the piece.

The magic movement, however, is the second (Andante). There is nothing like it in WF’s sonata, and nothing remotely like it in the works of J. S. Bach. It is the kind of piece for which the term *empfindsamer Stil* was coined. The key is F minor, traditionally a key of tortured moods. But no key signature is used—not because the key is in any way unreal, but because the very wayward harmonic digressions from it would entail a lot of tedious cancellations of accidentals. Even before the digressions take place the harmonic writing is boldly “subjective” and capricious: in m. 2, for example, a sigh figure is immediately followed by a leap of a diminished octave.

After the half cadence in m. 3 the melody breaks off altogether in favor of something that at first seems a contradiction in terms: an explicitly labeled instrumental recitative! Even without the label, the texture and the nature of the melodic writing would have labeled it conclusively. The giveaways are the pairs of repeated eighth notes on the first three downbeats, representing the prosody of “feminine endings” (line-endings in which the last syllable is unaccented). A knowing performer would recognize the notational conventions of opera here and perform them like a singer, interpolating an accented passing tone (or “prosodic appoggiatura”) in place of the first eighth as indicated in the score.

The recourse here to a patently operatic style—and the style associated in opera with “speaking,” at that—suggests that the *empfindsamer Stil* communicates, as it were, an unwritten or unspoken text. An operatic recitative (or *scena*, to cite the type of scene in which recitative alternates, as it does in CPE’s sonata, with a rhythmically steady melody) is traditionally a “formless” style of music that follows the shape of its text—in this case its unwritten text. Without an actual text to set, the music comes, as CPE puts it in his treatise, directly “from the soul,” and communicates, inchoately and pressingly, an *Empfindung* that transcends the limiting medium of words.

Thus instrumental recitative, the signature device of musical *Empfindsamkeit*, implies a direct address from the composer to the listener, who is taken into the composer’s confidence, as it were, and confided in person to person. The impression created is that of an individual intimately addressing a peer—and CPE’s favorite instrument for creating such an impression was the clavichord, an instrument capable of dynamic gradations unavailable on the harpsichord, but so soft that one has to be as near the performer in order to hear it as one would have to be in order to carry on a private conversation.

Also inchoate and pressing are the harmonies that support this wordless recitative—chromatic harmonies that deliberately depart from the model sequences of “normal” music and, if anything, recall the vagaries of the latest, most “decadent” madrigals. If a G natural is interpolated as a prosodic appoggiatura in m. 8, then the first recitative section (like WF’s already rather *empfindsamer* modulations in the first movement of his sonata) contains every degree of the chromatic scale. While the wildest, most disruptive touch is surely the immediate progression of the chord of B \flat in m. 4 to the vii° of B in the next measure, surely the most sophisticated progression is the enharmonic succession in mm. 7–8, whereby G \sharp is transformed to A \flat , reversing its tendency and smoothly restoring the original key.

CPE would not have called this style of his madrigalian, of course; nor, as already observed, did he himself use the word *empfindsamer* to describe it. His term for this inchoate, pressing idiom, with its rhythmic indefiniteness and harmonic waywardness, was the “fantasia” style. It was a style more often improvised than actually composed, as he tells us in his *Essay*, giving us a helpful reminder that the written music on which we base our historiography was still—is always—just the tip of the iceberg. Indeed, the vogue for *Empfindsamkeit* lent improvisation a new prestige, CPE strongly implying that the ability to improvise is the sine qua non of true musical talent: “It is quite possible for a person to have studied composition with good success and to have turned his pen to fine ends without his having

any gift for improvisation. But, on the other hand, a good future in composition can be assuredly predicted for anyone who can improvise, provided that he writes profusely and does not start too late.”¹⁰

A fantasia, then, might be characterized as a transcribed improvisation. J. S. Bach, a master improviser, wrote down only a few, notably a famous “Chromatic fantasia and fugue” in D minor. For him a fantasia was the equivalent of a prelude—not a fully viable piece in its own right but an introduction to a strict composition. CPE wrote down many more, especially in his later years, and was inclined, in the spirit of *Empfindsamkeit*, to regard them as freestanding, complete compositions. His most famous fantasia is the one in C minor, which he published as a *Probestück*, or “lesson piece,” to illustrate the *Essay* in 1753. Its beginning is shown in Ex. 8-4. Its many dynamic indications show it to have been conceived specifically in terms of the clavichord or the pianoforte, which was just then coming into widespread use.

The image displays the beginning of C.P.E. Bach's Fantasia in C minor. The score is written for a single instrument, likely a clavichord or pianoforte, and is in C minor (three flats) and 3/4 time. The tempo is marked 'Allegro moderato'. The piece begins with a recitativo style, characterized by a multi-octave range and a fluctuating tempo. The score includes dynamic markings such as *pp* (pianissimo), *f* (forte), and *p* (piano). The music features a variety of rhythmic patterns, including eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests. The score is presented in a standard musical notation format with a treble and bass clef.

ex. 8-4 C. P.E. Bach, Fantasia in C minor

The recitativo style is again invoked at the outset, but a recitativo sung by a supersinger with a multi-octave range. There is a purely conventional signature denoting “common time,” but there are no bars and hence no measures to count, signaling (according to CPE’s instructions in the *Essay*) a restlessly fluctuating tempo. Approximately halfway through the piece, however, a time signature of will supersede the original signature, bars will be measured out so

that the new tempo (Largo) is to be strictly maintained, and what amounts to an “arioso” will temporarily succeed the recitative. Here the power of dynamics to delineate quick emotional changes comes into its own; rapid-fire alternations of *fortissimo* and *piano*, with the *fortissimos* on the off-beats, amount to virtual palpitations. Once again, by casting the fantasia in a recognizable vocal form and employing an idiom that apes the nuances of passionate singing, an imaginary text is suggested, of which the music is the intensified expression, faithfully and “truthfully” tracking every fugitive shade of meaning and feeling.

So clearly does “empfindsamer” instrumental music aspire to the condition of speech-song in its emotional immediacy, and so convincingly does this fantasia conjure up an imaginary or internal theater, that in 1767 the poet Heinrich Wilhelm von Gerstenberg (1727–1823), a close friend of Klopstock and an acquaintance of the composer, was moved to furnish the fantasia with not one but two vocal lines that mainly doubled what was singable in the right-hand figuration. The first is fitted to a German translation of Socrates’s speech before committing forced suicide in Plato’s dialogue *Phaedo*; the second carries a paraphrase in fevered doggerel of the celebrated suicide soliloquy (“To be or not to be...”) from Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. These texts, the most searingly emotional outpourings Gerstenberg could find in all of literature, are overlaid to the beginning of the fantasia in Ex. 8-5. The Shakespearean travesty runs as follows:

<i>Seyn oder Nichtseyn,</i>	To be or not to be:
<i>Das ist die grosse Frage.</i>	That is the great question.
<i>Tod! Schlaf!</i>	Death! Sleep!
<i>Schlaf! und Traum!</i>	Sleep! and dream!
<i>Schwarzer Traum!</i>	Black dream!
<i>Todestraum!</i>	Death dream!

(Trans. Eugene Helm)

Invoking Shakespeare was a particularly pointed commentary on the *empfindsamer Stil*. Gerstenberg was a leader in the so-called *Sturm und Drang* (“Storm and stress”) movement, a loose literary association that sought to exalt spontaneous subjectivity and unrestrained “genius” over accepted rules and standards of art. Shakespeare (discovered by the Germans in the 1760s, in translations by the poet Christoph Martin Wieland) was their hero, worshiped and emulated for the way in which his plays “freely” mixed prose and poetry, tragedy and comedy, elevated and lowly characters and diction in a manner that—compared to the “neoclassical” style of the French theater or the Metastasian opera seria—seemed to subvert all restraints in the name of unmediated passionate expression.

A style that combined the declamatory freedom of recitative with the concentrated expressivity of the new instrumental music and the semantic specificity of words would synthesize, and hence surpass, all previous achievements in drama and music, thought Gerstenberg. He certainly implied as much when describing his Shakespearean adaptation of CPE’s fantasia in a letter to a friend:

I assume, first, that music without words expresses only general ideas, and that the addition of words brings out its full meaning.... On this basis I have underlaid a kind of text to some Bach keyboard pieces which were obviously never intended to involve a singing voice, but Klopstock and everybody have told me that these would be the most expressive pieces for singing that could be heard. Under the fantasy in the Essay, for example, I put Hamlet’s monologue as he fantasizes on life and death. A kind of middle condition of his shuddering soul is conveyed.¹¹

And Carl Friedrich Cramer, a professor of classics who edited a music magazine where he published Gerstenberg’s experiment in 1787, described it to his readers in terms that capture the very essence of *Sturm und Drang*, and that may even remind us of the theorizing that had attended the birth of opera two centuries before:

THE COMIC STYLE

And Carl Friedrich Cramer, a professor of classics who edited a music magazine where he published Gerstenberg's experiment in 1787, described it to his readers in terms that capture the very essence of *Sturm und Drang*, and that may even remind us of the theorizing that had attended the birth of opera two centuries before:

I believe that this eccentric essay belongs among the most important innovations that have ever been conceived by a connoisseur, and that to a *thinking* artist, one who does not always cringe in slavery to tradition, it may be a divining rod

EX. 8-5 C. P. E. Bach, Fantasia in C minor with Shakespeare text overlaid by Gerstenberg

The image shows a musical score for C. P. E. Bach's Fantasia in C minor with Shakespeare text overlaid by Gerstenberg. The score is in C minor, 3/4 time, and marked "Allegro moderato". It features three staves: Soprano (SOKRATES), Alto (HAMLET), and Piano (Klavier). The piano part includes dynamic markings like "pp" and "f". The vocal parts have German lyrics overlaid on the music.

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ex. 8-5 C. P. E. Bach, Fantasia in C minor with Shakespeare text overlaid by Gerstenberg

I believe that this eccentric essay belongs among the most important innovations that have ever been conceived by a connoisseur, and that to a *thinking* artist, one who does not always cringe in slavery to tradition, it may be a divining rod for discovering many deep veins of gold in the secret mines of music, in that it demonstrates in itself what can result from this dithyrambic union of instrumental and vocal music: an effect quite different from the customarily confined possibilities of self-willed forms and rhythms.¹²

But in an important and quite obvious sense both Gerstenberg and Cramer had missed the point. CPE Bach's intention, in creating his *empfindsamer Stil*, was not to express texts, however finely. For doing that, needless to say, there was plenty of precedent. Rather, his aim was to *transcend* texts—that is, to achieve a level of pure expressivity that language, bound as it was to semantic specifics, could never reach. This transcendently expressive music of which CPE was the fully self-conscious harbinger was later dubbed “absolute” music. It marked the first time that instrumental music was deemed to have decisively surpassed vocal music in spiritual content, and to be consequently more valuable as art.

And yet, to compound the paradox, the means by which the new instrumental music would transcend the vocal were

nevertheless all borrowed from the vocal. To Gerstenberg himself, CPE once wrote that “the human voice remains preeminent”¹³ as an expressive medium, and in his *Essay* he advises keyboard players to “miss no opportunity of hearing capable singers,” for “from this one learns to think in terms of song.”¹⁴ Only thus can one translate one’s ever fleeting, ever changing feelings into tones. And here at last we begin to get an inkling into the source of the tremendous metamorphosis in musical style and esthetics that took place over the course of the eighteenth century, ineluctably transforming the work of the Bach sons, along with everyone else’s, and ineluctably opening up a gaping generation gap. The ferment was caused by opera. That was the “main evolution” to which Daniel Heartz drew attention.

But if the *empfindsamer Stil* was the most obviously and consciously “operatic” instrumental style of the period (taking “operatic” figuratively to mean intensely passionate and grandly eloquent), it was rather one-sidedly so. It placed emphasis on the formally unstable aspects of opera, particularly on recitative—musical “speech.” (That is what can make it seem a throwback to the earliest days of opera, the days of the *seconda prattica* and the *stile rappresentativo*.) It was a kind of dramatic music that, as it happened, was practiced exclusively by composers who never wrote operas.

Notes:

(7) F. W. Marpurg, *Der critische Musicus an der Spree*, no. 27 (Berlin, 2 September 1749), p. 215.

(8) C. P. E. Bach, *Versuch über die wahre Art das Clavier zu spielen* (Berlin, 1753), p. 119.

(9) C. P. E. Bach, *Versuch*, pp. 122–23, trans. Piero Weiss in P. Weiss and R. Taruskin, *Music in the Western World*, 2nd ed., p. 230.

(10) C. P. E. Bach, *Essay on the True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments*, trans. William J. Mitchell (New York: Norton, 1949), p. 430.

(11) Heinrich Wilhelm von Gerstenberg, letter to Friedrich Nicolai (1767), quoted in Eugene Helm, “The ‘Hamlet’ Fantasy and the Literary Element in C. P. E. Bach’s Music,” *Musical Quarterly* LVIII (1972): 279.

(12) Carl Friedrich Cramer, *Flora* (Hamburg, 1787), p. xiii; quoted in Helm, “The ‘Hamlet’ Fantasy,” p. 287.

(13) C. P. E. Bach to H. W. von Gerstenberg (1773); quoted in Helm, “The ‘Hamlet’ Fantasy,” p. 291.

(14) C. P. E. Bach, *Versuch*, p. 121, trans. Piero Weiss in P. Weiss and R. Taruskin, *Music in the Western World*, 2nd ed., p. 230.

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Johann Christian Bach

Sonata

THE LONDON BACH

Chapter: CHAPTER 8 The Comic Style

Source: MUSIC IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

To see another side—a more direct and “purely musical” side—of opera’s stylistic impact on instrumental music, we need to examine the work of a composer who wrote both operas and sonatas. And that means examining the work of one more son of JS Bach—the youngest one, Johann (or John) Christian (1735–82, henceforth “JC”), the half brother of WF and CPE, who by the end of his life was far and away the most famous of the eighteenth-century Bachs.

Unlike his elder brothers, and as we may remember from chapter 4, JC followed a career completely at variance with his father’s. In some ways, in fact, it resembled Handel’s—in its restlessness, in its worldliness, and even in its geographical trajectory.



fig. 8-4 Portrait of J. C. Bach by Thomas Gainsborough.

His main teacher was his half brother CPE, with whom he went to live in Berlin after their father's death. In 1755, aged nineteen, he made the fateful trip to Italy. He took some additional instruction in Bologna from Giovanni Battista Martini (known as "Padre Martini"), a priest who was also a legendary music pedagogue; he found himself a patron in a Milanese count; and in 1760 he became an organist at Milan Cathedral, having first converted to Catholicism in order to qualify for the job. During the same year he wrote his first *opera seria*, *Artaserse*, to Metastasio's libretto (see chapter 4). From there he was summoned to Naples, the very nerve center of the *opera seria*, and in 1762 received an invitation to compose for the King's Theatre in London, Handel's old stamping ground.

Just as in Handel's day, music in London was to a larger extent than anywhere else a public, commercial affair. JC's career followed the ups and downs of the market. Squeezed out of the opera scene for a while by a jealous rival, he got himself appointed music master to Queen Charlotte, the German-born wife of King George III. Not only did this gain him a royal stipend, it also gave him a privilege to publish his works. The most lucrative prospects for printed music lay in keyboard and chamber music for domestic use ("such as ladies can execute with little trouble," to quote Dr. Burney, an admiring friend of the composer).¹⁵

In another entrepreneurial venture, JC joined forces with Carl Friedrich Abel, a composer and viola da gamba

virtuoso whose father had been the gambist at the Cöthen court during J. S. Bach's tenure as music director there, and who was also by chance living in London. Together they founded the British capital's most successful concert series, the "Bach-Abel Concerts," which lasted until JC's death. At the same time he maintained his ties with the opera stage—ties as much personal as professional, since he married an Italian soprano, Cecilia Grassi, the prima donna at the King's Theatre. His fame brought operatic commissions from the continent—notably from the famously musical court at Mannheim, in the Rhineland, and even from Paris, where he set some ancient librettos that had previously served Lully.

All in all, John Christian Bach was the most versatile—and for a while, the most fashionable—composer of his generation, turning out music in every contemporary medium and for every possible outlet. Like Handel, he could boast of being a self-made man. But unlike Handel, he did not die a wealthy one. His last years were marked by several reverses in fortune and the declining popularity of his music. He died so deeply in debt that it took the queen's intervention to get him decently buried and enable his widow to return home to Italy.



fig. 8-5 Portrait of Carl Friedrich Abel by Thomas Gainsborough.

John Christian Bach's first set of six keyboard sonatas was his opus 5 ("for the Piano Forte or Harpsichord" as the title page stipulates), printed in London in 1768. The second item in the set, sampled in Ex. 8-6, is in D major, a

brilliant orchestral key in which strings and brass alike were at their most naturally resonant. The sonata catches a bit of that brilliance. It sounds like a transcribed orchestral piece—more specifically, like a transcribed operatic overture of a kind JC had composed by then in quantity. (It was literally child's play for the fifteen-year-old Mozart, already an experienced composer—and who had already met John Christian Bach in London during one of his early concert tours as an infant prodigy—to “restore” the sonata to full orchestral dress a few years later in the guise of a piano concerto.)

In style the sonata is in the purest “galant” idiom, witty and ingratiating. The balanced phrases and short-range contrasts that we have observed in the sonatas of JC's half brothers have become even more pronounced, to the point where they were regarded as J. C. Bach's personal signature. “Bach seems to have been the first composer who observed the law of *contrast* as a *principle*,” wrote Dr. Burney in his *History*, exaggerating only slightly.¹⁶ “Before his time, contrast there frequently was, in the works of others, but it seems to have been merely accidental,” he went on (exaggerating a bit more, perhaps, in his enthusiasm), whereas Bach “seldom failed, after a rapid and noisy passage to introduce one that was slow and soothing.”

And so it certainly is at the outset of JC's first movement (Ex. 8-6): two bars of loud chordal fanfare followed immediately by two bars of soft continuous music, followed next by a balancing repetition of the whole four-bar complex. Contrast and balance operate in other dimensions as well: the loud bars describe an octave's descent, for example, while the soft ones describe an octave's ascent; the loud bars are confined to the tonic harmony, for another example, while the soft ones intermix tonic and dominant. Meanwhile the texture is the work of a composer who seems (despite his surname) never to have heard of counterpoint. It is, throughout and in many different (contrasting) ways, the kind of texture we nowadays call “homophonic,” consisting of a well-defined melody against an equally well-defined accompaniment.

Allegro di molto

5

9

12

15

19

23



System 1 (Measures 27-29): Treble clef, key signature of two sharps (F# and C#), 3/4 time. Measure 27: Treble has a sixteenth-note triplet (D4, E4, F#4) followed by a quarter rest; Bass has a steady eighth-note accompaniment. Measure 28: Treble has a sixteenth-note triplet (G4, A4, B4) followed by a quarter rest; Bass continues. Measure 29: Treble has a sixteenth-note triplet (C5, B4, A4) followed by a quarter rest; Bass continues.



System 2 (Measures 30-32): Treble clef. Measure 30: Treble has a sixteenth-note triplet (G4, A4, B4) followed by a quarter rest; Bass has a steady eighth-note accompaniment. Measure 31: Treble has a sixteenth-note triplet (C5, B4, A4) followed by a quarter rest; Bass continues. Measure 32: Treble has a sixteenth-note triplet (B4, A4, G4) followed by a quarter rest; Bass continues.



System 3 (Measures 33-35): Treble clef. Measure 33: Treble has a sixteenth-note triplet (A4, G4, F#4) followed by a quarter rest; Bass has a steady eighth-note accompaniment. Measure 34: Treble has a quarter rest followed by a quarter note (G4); Bass continues. Measure 35: Treble has a quarter rest followed by a quarter note (F#4); Bass continues.



System 4 (Measures 36-38): Treble clef. Measure 36: Treble has a sixteenth-note triplet (F#4, E4, D4) followed by a quarter rest; Bass has a steady eighth-note accompaniment. Measure 37: Treble has a quarter rest followed by a quarter note (E4); Bass continues. Measure 38: Treble has a quarter rest followed by a quarter note (D4); Bass continues.



System 5 (Measures 39-41): Treble clef. Measure 39: Treble has a sixteenth-note triplet (C5, B4, A4) followed by a quarter rest; Bass has a steady eighth-note accompaniment. Measure 40: Treble has a quarter rest followed by a quarter note (B4); Bass continues. Measure 41: Treble has a quarter rest followed by a quarter note (A4); Bass continues.



System 6 (Measures 42-44): Treble clef. Measure 42: Treble has a quarter note (G4); Bass has a steady eighth-note accompaniment. Measure 43: Treble has a quarter note (F#4); Bass continues. Measure 44: Treble has a quarter note (E4); Bass continues.



System 7 (Measures 45-47): Treble clef. Measure 45: Treble has a quarter note (D4); Bass has a steady eighth-note accompaniment. Measure 46: Treble has a quarter note (C4); Bass continues. Measure 47: Treble has a quarter note (B3); Bass continues.



System 8 (Measures 48-50): Treble clef. Measure 48: Treble has a quarter note (A3); Bass has a steady eighth-note accompaniment. Measure 49: Treble has a quarter note (G3); Bass continues. Measure 50: Treble has a quarter note (F#3); Bass continues.

The image displays a musical score for J. C. Bach's Sonata in D, Op. 5, no. 2, covering measures 53 through 77. The score is written for piano and is in the key of D major (two sharps). It consists of seven systems of music, each with a treble and bass clef staff. The notation includes various rhythmic values, accidentals, and dynamic markings such as *tr*, *p*, and *f*. The piece is in a binary form, with measures 53-60 and 61-68 forming the first section, and measures 69-76 and 77-84 forming the second section. The final measure shown is measure 77, which features a prominent 'fanfare' motif.

ex. 8-6 J. C. Bach, Sonata in D, Op. 5, no. 2

In overall form the sonata meets what by now must be our expectation: all three movements are binary structures. But the ways in which that same “there and back” structure is delineated differ very tellingly each time. The first movement, by far the longest, manages to cram a huge amount of finely contrasted and balanced material into its generous yet orderly unfolding. How that orderliness is achieved despite that abundance is the fascinating thing to observe. It is what made J. C. Bach the greatly influential figure that he was. Notwithstanding all appearances of profligacy, the movement is a study in economy and efficiency.

The arresting fanfare idea heard at the outset, for example, is heard only once again (not counting its “automatic” repetition as part of the unwritten sectional repeat)—namely, at the “double return” (m. 73). Despite its small share of the movement’s running time, its strategic placement lends it an enormous structural importance, for it serves both to launch the movement’s harmonic trajectory and to signal its completion. It thus plays the defining role in articulating a musical form that is equally the product of thematic and harmonic processes. The shape of the movement depends on our recognition of significant melodic and harmonic goals, and on our noticing their achievement. The “fanfare” theme is there to facilitate that recognition, and that makes it the movement’s mainspring.

A similar functional efficiency characterizes all the other themes and melodic ideas in the movement. It is as if the

older motivic (and “affective”) prodigality we noticed and admired in the work of JC’s brother WF—short-range contrast as its own reward—had been sorted and organized by JC into a higher and more energetic unity by assigning roles to each component. Thus the new idea—arpeggios in the left hand accompanied by tremolandos in the right—that follows at m. 9 introduces an unbroken span that lasts an asymmetrical ten bars until the next silent beat or caesura, and that seems to have as its assigned task the progressive introduction of new leading tones (first G#, then D#) along the circle of fifths so as to accomplish the “there” of the “there and back” on which all binary forms depend. On its completion, it is the quarter rest or caesura (a term borrowed from poetry, where it means an empty foot) that serves to mark the arrival at the new tonic, A, in m. 19. Silence plays as important a role in articulating the form of a piece like this as the notes ever do.

We have seen this “modulatory” maneuver countless times by now, in arias, concertos, suites, and sonatas; but we have never before seen anyone make such a look-Ma-I’m-modulating production of it as here. From this point (m. 19) to the double bar, the music is stably in the key of A major. Stable tonality implies stable (that is, symmetrical) phrase structures, and so we are not surprised to find at this point a new, full-blown melody—the longest self-contained musical “section” in the piece so far—whose tuneful abundance is artfully organized into balanced “antecedent” and “consequent” phrases.

Its opening section, four bars ending with a caesura at m. 22, can be broken down into two sequential halves, the first ending with a piquant “lombard” rhythm, the second with a half cadence (i.e., a cadence on the dominant). Phrases ending on the dominant, requiring continuation, are “antecedents”; their balancing “consequents,” as here, often begin like repetitions (compare the beginnings of m. 19 and m. 23), creating “parallel periods.” The four balancing bars (mm. 23–26) also end with a half cadence, requiring yet another phrase to reach the (local) tonic.

This requirement is met—or (alternatively) this function is supplied; or (yet another way of putting it) this role is played—by a new eight-bar phrase (mm. 27–34), itself full of contrasts and balances, to balance the first. Its first four bars consist of two quick (one-measure) upward sweeps balanced by a slow (two-measure) undulating descent. The concluding four, which also break down into 1 + 1 + 2, finally bring back the A-major triad in root position, which alone can mark a “closure.” From here on it’s confirmation all the way: a pair of contrasting two-bar phrases, immediately repeated for a total of eight measures, that regularly reapproach the (local) tonic, reinforcing the sense of arrival and, finally, of closure (for which purpose a witty reference is made to the opening chordal idea).

To sum up the contents of the first half of the movement: it does what all such binary openings do, but does it in a newly dramatic and functionally differentiated way. Four main melodic/harmonic “areas” can be distinguished, which contrast and balance one another just as they are themselves made up of internal contrasts and balances:

- 1. The first eight measures, in which the tonic and dominant of the main key are introduced and alternated, provide the harmonic launching pad.
- 2. The next ten measures (asymmetrically divided 7 + 3) accomplish a “bridging” or “modulatory” function; the fact that their purpose is basically connective is equally apparent from their harmonic instability and from their melodic asymmetry. The two factors are always interdependent.
- 3. The next sixteen measures reestablish harmonic stability (in a new area) and melodic symmetry: the first eight are a parallel period that ends on a half cadence. They are balanced by eight bars ending on a full cadence.
- 4. The last eight measures, which contrast two-by-two and balance four-by-four, confirm arrival and effect closure. Now it is time to come “back” via the FOP. Again the familiar process unfolds through a remarkable diversity of material, but an equally remarkable functional organization.

The first thing heard after the double bar is anew melody (m. 43) over a characteristic arpeggiated accompaniment (three-note chords broken low-high-middle-high) that has been known ever since the eighteenth century as the “Alberti bass” after Domenico Alberti (d. 1746), an Italian composer who famously abused it. At first the new tune seems to be a stable melody in the dominant, but it makes its cadence after a telltale five measures, and its lack of symmetry is enhanced by the way the expected caesura is elided at its conclusion. Another obviously “modulatory” phrase of four bars impinges at that moment (“obviously” modulatory because it is modeled on the bridging material from the first half). It leads through a bass A# to an eight-bar melody (m. 52) consisting of a loud four-bar phrase

and its echo that fully establishes a cadence on B minor (vi), the expected FOP.

And just as a four-bar bridge and a brief but full-blown symmetrical melody had led away from the dominant to the FOP, the same melodic complex leads from the FOP to the “double return.” Note particularly how A, the dominant pitch, is sustained as a pedal through the whole eight-bar melody (mm. 65–73) that immediately precedes the return, creating a harmonic tension demanding especial relief. The double return palpably *impends*, creating the kind of suspense we associate with drama. Once again we may say that a familiar form is being newly “dramatized.”

From the double return to the end of the movement, the music consists entirely of material introduced in the first half. Indeed, except for the shrinking of the bridge material (since it is no longer needed for modulatory purposes), the music is a veritable replay of the first half, with all the tunes stably confined to the tonic key, thus creating a sense of structural balance, of melodic invention governed by harmonic function, at the very longest possible range.

What we have just traced could be described, then, as a “maximized” binary form, in which harmonic departures and arrivals are dramatized and elaborated by drawing on a seemingly inexhaustible melodic well. The melodies draw on a common fund of figures and turns: note, for example, how the “new” material immediately after the double bar employs a skipping “lombard” heard previously (compare m. 20 with m. 43). But the dominant impression is one of maximum variety of material organized by the overriding harmonic motion into a maximum unity of concept.

The remaining movements of the sonata, like most sonata movements of the “Bach’s sons” generation, are also cast in binary form—but not in the “maximized” version that gives the first movement (like most first movements, beginning with J. C. Bach) its special preeminent character. The second movement reverts to a procedure much closer to that of Bach the Father: the two halves closely mirror one another melodically as they trace the customary tonal progression, beginning and ending similarly though with reversed harmonic poles, and differing chiefly in the middle, where the second half makes its customary deflection toward the FOP—no actual cadence this time but just a chromatic color: an augmented-sixth harmony over \flat VI (E-flat).

The last movement, while also cast in a seemingly familiar traditional form—a pair of minuets (old-style *galanteries*), the second (marked “Minore”) in the parallel minor—actually displays an interestingly novel feature. Like the first movement (and unlike any actual binary dance movement we have as yet encountered) both minuets sport “double returns” in their second halves. The functional association of theme with key has truly become a standard form-defining feature. Another feature that has (or will shortly) become standard is the substitution of III (the so-called relative major) as opposite harmonic pole for pieces in the minor mode, such as the second minuet.

Notes:

(15) Burney, *A General History of Music*, Vol. II, ed. F. Mercer (New York: Dover, 1957), p. 866.

(16) Burney, *A General History of Music*, Vol. II, ed. F. Mercer, p. 866.

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Binary form

Chamber music

Jean-Joseph Cassanéa de Mondonville

Carl Friedrich Abel

SOCIABILITY MUSIC

Chapter: CHAPTER 8 The Comic Style

Source: MUSIC IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES

Author(s): Richard Taruskin



fig. 8-6 “French concert” (actually a salon). Engraving by Duclos after a painting by St.-Aubin.

Although it is notoriously easy to overdraw such matters, comparison of the sonata by C. P. E. Bach with that of his younger half brother shows up the two complementary sides of what might be called the “bourgeois” or “domestic” music of the mid-eighteenth century. Stylistically and formally they are similar enough, but “attitudinally” they contrast markedly. CPE’s is solitary, introspective, “inner-directed” music; JC’s is sociable, outgoing. The one explores personal, private, even unexpressed feelings; we easily imagine it performed for an audience of one (or even none but the player, seated at the clavichord), late at night, in a mood of emotional self-absorption. It implies a surrounding hush. The other is party music, implying bright lights, company, a surrounding hubbub of conversation. That about sums up the difference between *Empfindung* and *galanterie*, and it is no accident that the one word is German and the other French.

It was the spirit of *galanterie*—conviviality, pleasant “causerie” (another French word in international use)—that gave rise to what we now call chamber music in its modern sense. The first pieces of this kind, in fact, grew directly out of the keyboard sonata, and it happened first in France. The earliest composers to attempt the transformation of keyboard sonatas into sociable ensembles were a couple of forgotten Parisian violinists: Jean-Joseph Cassanéa de Mondonville (1711–72) and Louis-Gabriel Guillemain (1705–70).



fig. 8-7 Jean-Joseph Cassanea de Mondonville, by Maurice Quentin de la Tour.

Their inclinations are well illustrated by the titles of Guillemain’s sonata sets: *Premier amusement à la mode* (op. 8, 1740), for example, or *Six sonates en quators ou conversations galantes et amusantes* (op. 12, 1743). (In light of these titles, it is irresistible to mention that, in the words of the sonata-historian William S. Newman, Guillemain was “a neurotic, alcoholic misanthrope, who could not bring himself to perform in public, squandered his better-than-average earnings, and finally took his own life.”¹⁷ In this case, anyway, the style was not the man.) These were still old-fashioned continuo pieces, but as early as 1734 Mondonville—whose wife Anne Jeanne Boucon was a well-known harpsichordist who had studied with Rameau—took a decisive and much-imitated step in the name of *galanterie* that completely reversed the textural perspective. He published as his opus 3 a set of *Pièces de clavecin en sonates avec accompagnement de violon*, “harpsichord pieces grouped into sonatas, accompanied by a violin.” What he offered merely as a piquant novelty quickly took root as a new musical genre. By the 1760s it had turned into a craze that finally marked curtains for the basso continuo style.

The “accompanied keyboard sonata” initiated by Mondonville was (in theory, at least) a fully composed, self-sufficient keyboard sonata to which an obbligato for the violin or flute could be added *ad libitum*. In theory this was something that could be done to any keyboard sonata, and there is evidence that accompanied sonatas existed for some time as a “performance practice” before the first expressly composed specimens saw the light. Indeed, we

have already seen an instance—Couperin’s “Le rossignol-en-amour” (Ex. 6-12)—where a composer explicitly suggested turning one of his keyboard pieces into an ensemble piece by giving its melody part to a flute.

In practice, from the very earliest composed specimens, the “accompanying” part added something indispensable to the texture, turning the piece into a true duo, to which a cello or viol could be added to double and lightly embellish the bass line, making a trio. Unlike Guillemain’s continuo pieces, the result was a “conversation galante et amusante” for truly equal conversational partners, each with a melodic life of its own. As the excerpt in Ex. 8-7 from the minuet in Mondonville’s fourth accompanied sonata shows, even at this early stage the texture is quite different from that of J. S. Bach’s trio sonatas with obbligato harpsichord. There is no imitative polyphony, for one thing; the bass figuration shows Alberti-ish tendencies, for another; and for a third (possibly most crucial) thing, the texture is not so clearly laid out in contrapuntal “voices.” The two hands of the harpsichord frequently combine in parallel motion to become a single “voice,” and the violin (especially at such moments) is apt to dip beneath and take over the “bass.”

Mondonville’s earliest imitators were Rameau, his musical father-in-law (whose 1741 collection of *Pièces de clavecin en concert* for harpsichord solo and two obbligato parts contains a sarabande called “La Boucon,” dedicated to Mondonville’s wife), and Guillemain, who published a collection exactly modeled on Mondonville’s, and identically titled, in 1745.

The image shows a musical score for an accompanied sonata. It is titled "Allegro" and "Violin" for the upper part, and "Clavecin" for the lower part. The time signature is 3/4. The score is divided into three systems. The first system shows the beginning of the piece. The second system continues the melody and accompaniment. The third system starts at measure 29 and ends with "etc.". The Clavecin part features a characteristic Alberti bass pattern in the left hand and a more melodic line in the right hand. The Violin part provides a melodic counterpoint to the Clavecin.

ex. 8-7 Jean-Joseph Cassanéa de Mondonville, Accompanied Sonata in C, Op. 3, no. 4

By the 1760s, accompanied keyboard sonatas were being written everywhere, and J. C. Bach and his London cohort Abel had become preeminent in the genre, of all musical forms and media the most quintessentially galant. In fact, JC published exactly twice as many accompanied keyboard sonatas (forty-eight) as unaccompanied ones, which gives an idea of the genre's quick ascendancy, a rise that testifies above all to its social utility. Even CPE was moved to try his hand at this profitable genre, but half-heartedly; according to a famous quip of JC's (like all such reported comments, possibly apocryphal), "my brother lives to compose and I compose to live."¹⁸ It would be hard to come up with a better encapsulation of *Empfindsamkeit* vis-à-vis *galanterie*!

For a last mid-century sonata let us turn to the fourth item in Abel's opus 2, a set of *Six Sonatas for the Harpsichord with Accompaniments for a Violin or German* [i.e., transverse or modern] *Flute and Violoncello*, published in London (with a dedication to the Earl of Buckinghamshire) in 1760. The style will be familiar from JC's sonata, but the piece is shorter, simpler, more schematic. There are only two movements, a moderately "expanded" or maximized binary followed by a minuet. This is commercial fare par excellence.

The principle of contrast is taken to such an extreme at the beginning of the first movement (Ex. 8-8a) as to amount practically to a spoof—"ingenious jesting with art," as Domenico Scarlatti, *galant avant la lettre* (galant before it had a name), might have said. The tonic is established with a deliberately over-pompous four-measure fanfare in orchestral style, thumped out with octaves in the bass. It is followed by a three-bar transition to a half cadence, after which the key, the texture, and even the scoring (thanks to the entrance of the obbligato) all change suddenly: a long, lyrical, legato melody in two distinct halves, accompanied by a counterpoint-dissolving Alberti bass.

Allegro moderato

4

7

10

ex. 8-8a Carl Friedrich Abel, Sonata in B-flat, Op. 2, no. 4, first movement, mm. 1–11

(Tempo di Menuet)

ex. 8-8b Carl Friedrich Abel, Sonata in B-flat, Op. 2, no. 4, end of second movement

The second half embarks on its journey from the dominant to the tonic with a reference to the opening fanfare —treating it, in other words, in the manner of a ritornello. Thus invoking or alluding to the concerto genre is another way of jesting ingeniously. This time the fanfare dissolves into a new melody whose job it is to lead (through some chromatic harmony and some asymmetrical phrase lengths) to the FOP, in this case D minor (iii), articulated by a reference to the second part of the lyrical theme introduced before the double bar.

The D minor cadence is followed unceremoniously by a brusque return to the tonic through the briefest of transitional motives in the bass. When the tonic arrives, of course, so does the opening fanfare (ritornello), and the movement proceeds to its conclusion through an only slightly abbreviated replay of the whole first half of the movement, the only differences being the omission of the no longer necessary transition to the dominant half cadence (mm. 5–7 in Ex. 8-8a) and the transposition of the long lyrical tune from its original pitching in the key of the dominant to the tonic. The second half of the piece could be described as containing virtually the whole first half, plus a bridging section devoted to harmonic caprice.

The minuet is about as ingratiating, unproblematic, and “popular” as the composer could have made it. The first half does not even leave the tonic; it consists of two parallel periods, the first ending on a half cadence, the second on a

full—the sort of thing called “open” and “closed” as far back as the Middle Ages and still common in the eighteenth century in folk (i.e., “popular”) tunes, of which Abel’s minuet thus counts as a sort of sophisticated—or, in the etymological sense, “urbane”—imitation. Because the first half does not leave the tonic, the dominant can function in the second half as the FOP. There are no cadences at all on secondary functions, just an occasional whiff of chromaticism (including a lone diminished seventh) on the way to the last dominant cadence.

When the piece is effectively complete, the composer tacks on a 16-bar coda (Ex. 8-8b) over a satisfying tonic pedal, reasserting both tonal and rhythmic stability at maximum strength. The whole passage might as well have been written for the sake of this book, to provide a demonstration of phrase symmetry. The sixteen bars are really eight plus an exact repetition, and each eight breaks down to four plus four, in which the first four consists of a two-bar plagal cadence and its literal repetition, and the second four consists of the very same plagal cadence joined to an authentic one. More naively “natural” than this—as opposed to cunningly “artificial”—music could hardly get. (But of course to be this “natural” takes a lot of artifice.) It is in the second half of the minuet, by the way, that the harpsichord and the “accompanying” instrument get to engage in a bit of dialogue (the only imitative or even contrapuntal writing in the whole sonata), effectively precluding a performance of the piece as a straight keyboard sonata. It is genuine chamber music for actual chamber (that is, domestic) use, and its style and tone are wholly typical of the genre in its earliest stage.

Notes:

(17) William S. Newman, *The Sonata in the Classic Era* (2nd ed., New York: Norton, 1972), p. 621.

(18) Quoted in Stephen Roe, “Johann Christian Bach,” in *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, Vol. II (2nd ed., New York: Grove, 2000), p. 417.

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Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

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Domenico Alberti

Baldassare Galuppi

Opera buffa

“NATURE”

Chapter: CHAPTER 8 The Comic Style

Source: MUSIC IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

But whence this cult of the “natural”? And where, once and for all, did the style we have been tracking in this chapter originate? We still have not traced this very important river to its source, for all the hints and suggestions thrown out along the way. Far from solving the historical problem (the problem of the “black hole”) with which we launched this chapter, all we have been doing is restating it over and over again, *da capo*, with variations and embellishments.

As the very existence of the “Alberti bass” already suggests, there was a slightly earlier but mainly concurrent repertoire of sonatas by Italian composers who deserted the violin family for the keyboard. Their work may indeed be compared with the music of the Bach sons and their friends, and has often been cited as its main model. Besides Alberti himself, whose name mainly lives on thanks to the term associated with it, the most famous member of this group was the Venetian opera composer Baldassare Galuppi (1706–85), a major international figure, who left in addition to his stage works almost one hundred keyboard sonatas of which only a fraction were published, mainly in two books of six issued by the London publisher John Walsh in the late 1750s.

In style, Galuppi’s sonatas (and Alberti’s, too) are eminently galant (see Ex. 8-9): their textures are homophonic, replete with arpeggiated basses and similar figurations; they consist of two or three movements, almost uniformly in binary form; and the keyboardists proceed not by spinning out motives in great waves and sequences in the manner of the older violinists (or their best pupil, Bach the Father), but through short-breathed contrast and balance, and through lyrical, symmetrically laid-out and cadentially articulated melodies. Their evident model was not tireless bowing, but graceful singing. And what else would one expect from composers who worked mainly for the stage?

Allegro ma non tanto

ex. 8-9a Domenico Alberti, Sonata in C, Op. 1, no. 3 (London, 1748), mm. 1–4.

ex. 8-9b Baldassare Galuppi, *Sonata no. 2* (London, 1756), I, mm. 69–79

Once again we are returned to opera as source of it all; but now, having named Galuppi, we are in a position to make a more positive and specific identification of the operatic source. Beginning in the 1740s, Galuppi was the first major international protagonist of a new operatic genre, one that he and his main librettist Carlo Goldoni called *dramma giocoso* (“humorous drama”), but that took Europe by storm (and is now remembered) as *opera buffa*—from *buffo*, Italian for buffoon or clown. If the *opera seria* was a form of nobly sublimated musical tragedy, *opera buffa* was musical comedy—the earliest form of full-fledged comic opera.

Here at last is where the body, as the saying goes, is buried. Here is the great stylistic transformer of European music, the spark that ignited what Daniel Hertz called the “main evolution” that somehow managed to take place behind the backs of Bach the Father and Handel. In the comic opera lies the common source for all the musical styles we have been tracking, even the nominally melancholy *empfindsamer Stil*. And as we shall see, by the late eighteenth century, *opera buffa* would decisively replace (or more precisely, displace) the *seria* as the most vital—and even serious!—form of musical theater.

But to appreciate the role of “humorous drama” as a hotbed of stylistic transformation or a plugger of historical holes, which after all is what we have set out to do in this chapter, we must look beyond it to its own antecedents. Then we shall have a proper starting point from which to tell at least the beginnings of a coherent story about the musical eighteenth century, and its relationship to the general social and intellectual currents of the time. One more flashback is necessary.

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Intermezzo

Giuseppe Maria Orlandini

INTERMISSION PLAYS

Chapter: CHAPTER 8 The Comic Style

Source: MUSIC IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

During opera's first century, especially at the public theaters of Venice (and as we have known since chapter 1), it was considered good form to mix serious and comic scenes and characters, producing a kind of heterogeneous "Shakespearean" drama that afforded audiences the very utmost in varied entertainment. Then the reformers got to work. Seeking to restore the dignity of the earliest "neoclassical" (courtly) operas and justify the genre in light of classical poetic theory, librettists began to regard comic scenes as breaches of taste. Such scenes were banished, at first by the high-minded dilettantes who ran the learned academies, finally by the frosty Metastasio.

But what is kicked out the front door often climbs back in through the window. The public, especially in Venice, was unwilling to give up a favorite operatic treat—nor, more to the point, were they willing to forgo the pleasure of seeing and hearing their favorite *buffi*, many of whom had large followings. So a curious compromise was reached. The newly standardized *opera seria* remained free of any taint of comedy, but little comic plays with music were shown during the intermissions. These, naturally enough, were called intermezzos ("intermission plays"). They were usually in two little acts (called *parte*, "parts") to supply the intermissions required by a typical three-act *opera seria*, and almost always featured two squabbling characters, a soprano and a bass, these being the most typical ranges for *buffi*. Often enough they were at first loosely based on the comedies of Molière or his many imitators.

The first set of intermezzos for which a libretto survives was given in Venice in 1706 (it was called *Frappolone e Florinetta* after its bickering pair). Immediately specialist librettists and composers sprang up for the genre, and it assumed a very particular style. It is that style, which directly reflected the strange nature of the relationship between the intermezzos and their host operas, that played such a colossal—and entirely unforeseen—role in the evolution of eighteenth-century music. We have already seen some of the unforeseen products of that evolution. Their existence is the famous "problem" we have been addressing. Here, at last, are the beginnings of a solution to it, based on recent investigations and speculations by a number of scholars, particularly Piero Weiss and Wye J. Allanbrook, who have made progress at filling the black hole.¹⁹

The first big international hit scored by an intermezzo composer was *Il marito giocatore e la moglie bacchettona* ("The gambler husband and the domineering wife") by Giuseppe Maria Orlandini (1676–1760), a Florentine composer active in Bologna who was even older than Bach the Father, and who actually spent most of his life composing *opera seria* to lofty "Arcadian" libretti. The set contains three intermezzos, each depicting an episode in the rocky married life of the title characters: in the first, the wife, exasperated at the husband's behavior, resolves to divorce him; in the second the husband, disguised as the judge at the divorce court, promises to find in the wife's favor if she will sleep with him and, after she agrees, reveals himself and throws her out of the house; in the third, the wife comes back disguised as a mendicant pilgrim and soothes the husband into a reconciliation.

First performed in 1715 (as *Bajocco e Serpilla*, after the names of the title characters), Orlandini's intermezzos made the rounds of all the Italian theaters as actual intermission features, and, performed in sequence as a sort of three-act comic opera in their own right, conquered foreign capitals as well, reaching London (as *The Gamester*) in 1737, and Paris (as *Il giocatore*) as late as 1752. Everywhere it made a sensation. Perhaps the aria in which the distraught husband hurls imprecations at his wife will show why (Ex. 8-10).

In keeping with the strictest Aristotelian principles, according to which tragedy portrayed "people better than ourselves" and comedy "people worse than ourselves," this aria is "low" music with a perfect vengeance.²⁰ Everything about it is impoverished. The texture is reduced to unisons. The vocal line is reduced to barely articulate ejaculations

of rage. The melody is reduced to asthmatic gasping and panting with insistently repeated cadences that prevent phrases from achieving any length at all. The structure is reduced to a patchwork or mosaic of these little snuffles, snorts, and wheezes. It might be thought a mere parody, and so the music of the early intermezzos is often described. And yet it came, *particularly to foreign audiences*, as a revelation.

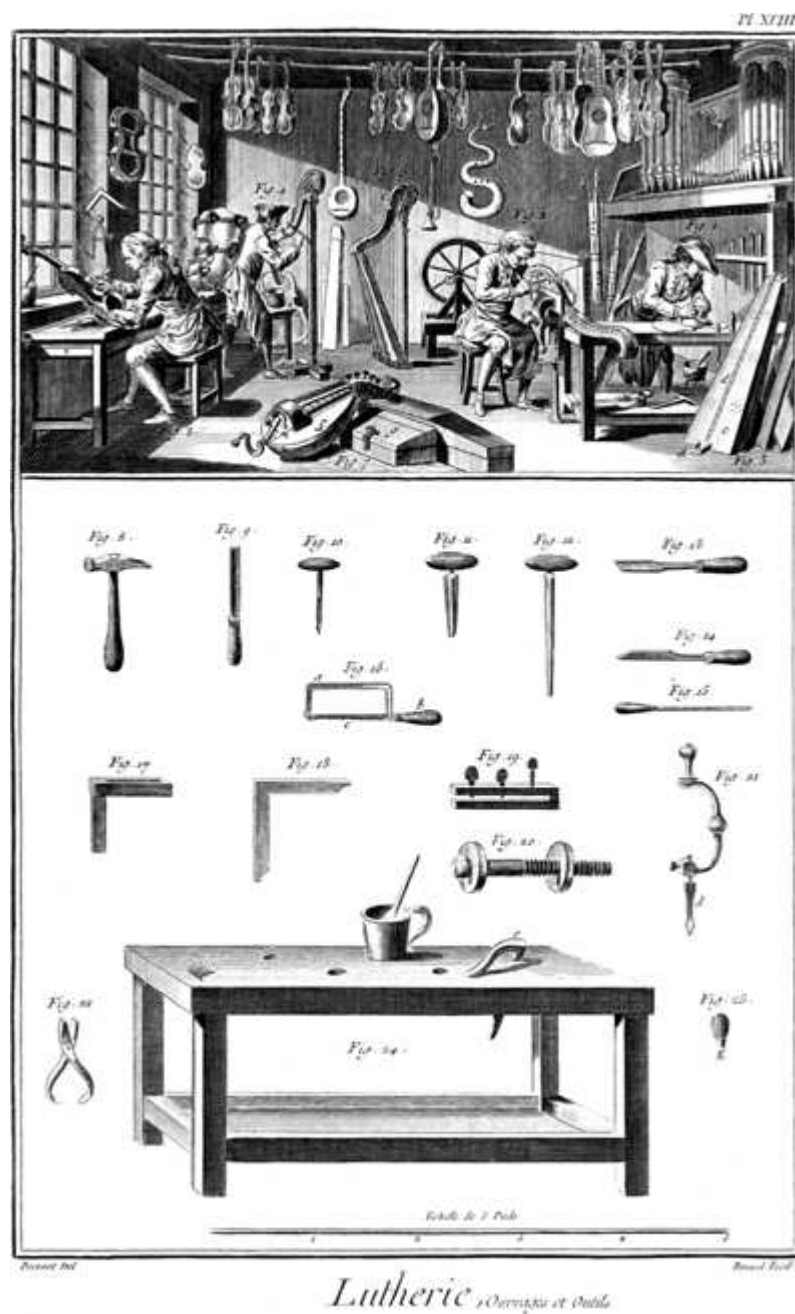


fig. 8-8 “Instrument making” (*Lutherie*) from Diderot’s *Encyclopédie*.

BAJOCOCCO B

Violins, Violas

Basso

6 Si si si ma - la -

11 der - ta, ma - la - der - ta, ma - la - der - ta sia pur la has -

15 set - ta e chi l'in - ven - tò e chi l'in - ven

19 tò

ex. 8-10 Bajocco's aria from Giuseppe Maria Orlandini's *Il giocatore*

One of the most precious testimonials to that revelation came from the pen of Denis Diderot, the famous French encyclopedist, in his satire *Rameau's Nephew*, written early in the 1760s, while the elder Rameau was still alive.

From the mouth of this fictional character (albeit based on a real person, a nephew of the great French composer who plied a modest trade as a music teacher and who had a considerable reputation in society as a “character”), Diderot voiced the widespread amazement of French artists and thinkers at the art of the *buffi*: “What realism! What expression!” he exclaims. And to those who might scoff—“Expression of what?!”—he spells it out with ardor bordering on anger, and with characteristically bizarre imagery:

It is the animal cry of passion that should dictate the melodic line, and these moments should tumble out quickly one after the other, phrases must be short and the meaning self-contained, so that the musician can utilize the whole and each part, varying it by omitting a word or repeating it, adding a missing word, turning it this way and that like a polyp, but without destroying it.²¹

What the fictionalized nephew of Rameau is describing here is nothing other than the revolutionary new style of

musical discourse we began investigating with the music of Bach's sons: short phrases that are musically and expressively self-contained so that they may be balanced and contrasted, so that they can express emotions the way they really present themselves in the real physical—or “animal”—world: the natural world.

The strange reference to the “polyp” is the most telling touch of all. In the eighteenth century the word referred not to a tumorous growth but to a class of marine animals that included the octopus and the squid—animals with soft, amorphous bodies and many feet. They were a symbol of changeability: an association, as Allanbrook has pointed out, that resonates with the more familiar word “protean,” also nautical, which comes from Proteus, the Old Man of the Sea in Greek mythology, who could change himself into any shape he pleased.

It was its protean changeability—the very quality we have already isolated as the essential, inexplicable newness of mid-century instrumental music—that, coupled with its freshness and its elemental simplicity, gave the lowly comic music of the intermezzos its air of perfect naturalness and made it so influential. In an age that still regarded the nature and purpose of art as imitation of nature, this could be viewed as an improved art. Comparing Orlandini's imitation of rage with Handel's in *Vivi, tiranno!* (Ex. 7-1), we can be struck anew by its directness, compared with which Handel's elaborate melismas on the emblematic word *furore* can seem the height of stilted “baroque” contrivance.

The grand Handelian rhetoric stood revealed as the product of labored, unnatural artifice. Orlandini's simple syllabic setting with its frequent repeated notes and wide vocal leaps was “the animal cry of passion,” intensified by an orchestral accompaniment that in its close tracking of the vocal part seemed to mirror not only the singing but even the gestures of the actor. The art of tragedy was the high rhetorical style. The low art of comedy was born of nature. It was “true.” The music of change in the eighteenth century—Heartz's “main evolution”—was the music of comedy. What we have already traced has been its transfer into the wordless medium, which it transformed into another medium of nature and truth. The later eighteenth-century style was in effect the comic style.

Notes:

(19) See Piero Weiss, “Baroque Opera and the Two Verisimilitudes,” in *Music and Civilization: Essays in Honor of Paul Henry Lang*, eds. E. Strainchamps and M. R. Maniates (New York: Norton, 1984), pp. 117–26; *idem*, “La diffusione del repertorio operistico nell'Italia del Settecento: Il caso dell'opera buffa,” in S. Davoli, ed., *Civiltà teatrale e Settecento emiliano* (Bologna, 1986), pp. 241–56; *idem*, “Ancora sulle origini dell'opera comica: Il linguaggio,” *Studi pergolesiani/Pergolesi Studies I* (1986): 124–48; and especially Wye J. Allanbrook, “Comic Flux and Comic Precision,” and “A Voiceless Mimesis,” lectures delivered at the University of California at Berkeley, in the fall of 1994 while this book was being drafted, forthcoming as *The Secular Commedia: Comic Mimesis in Late Eighteenth-Century Music* (Ernest Bloch Lectures, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press).

(20) Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. Kenneth A. Telford (Chicago: Regnery, 1961), pp. 10–29.

(21) Denis Diderot, *Le Neveu de Rameau*, trans. Wye J. Allanbrook in “Comic Flux and Comic Precision.”

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Giovanni Battista Pergolesi

La serva padrona

Jean-Jacques Rousseau

THE “WAR OF THE BUFFOONS”

Chapter: CHAPTER 8 The Comic Style

Source: MUSIC IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

The great masterwork of the intermezzo genre—if such a contradiction in terms can be admitted—was *La serva padrona* (“The servant mistress”) by the precocious Giovanni Battista Pergolesi (1710–36), a Neapolitan, who died of consumption at the age of 26 and who became, for that reason among others, a figure of enduring romantic fame. In his short life (with an active career lasting only five years) Pergolesi managed to compose ten works for the stage, of which four were *opere serie* (two to texts by Metastasio) and three were two-part intermezzos.

La serva padrona, written expressly to be played between the acts of one of Pergolesi’s own *serie*, was first performed with it at the Teatro San Bartolomeo on 5 September 1733 in honor of the birthday of Elisabeth Christina, the consort of the Austrian Emperor Charles VI, then nominal ruler of Naples. The evening’s main event, *Il prigioniero superbo* (“The proud prisoner”), was soon forgotten. The intermezzo, however, quickly became world famous, at first thanks to performances by traveling troupes of *buffi* who within ten years of its first performance took it all around Italy and as far away as Munich, Dresden, and even Hamburg in the north of Germany.

By the end of the 1740s it had been heard in Paris, and by the end of the ‘50s it had conquered London, St. Petersburg, and Madrid. And as we can tell from its printed librettos, it was (with a single main exception) still being performed then pretty much intact, the way it was originally written. That was extremely unusual for any opera in the eighteenth century, but particularly for a “low” piece. It means that the work was already regarded as a classic, a work exemplifying its type to perfection. And so it remains: *La serva padrona* is still occasionally performed and recorded as a two-act opera, the earliest comic opera in the standard repertory.

Its plot and cast of characters are of the usual kind. There are two sung roles, Serpina (soprano) and her master and guardian Uberto (bass), plus a mute role (Vespone, another servant) who gets to laugh once. The importance of conventions even to this supposedly “natural” genre is epitomized by the heroine’s name.



fig. 8-9b Late eighteenth-century portrait of Pergolesi, done after his early death had made him a figure of romantic legend.

Like Serpilla in *Il marito giocatore* it comes from *serpe* (snake), identifying Serpina as another “sharp-tongued” female, a stock figure ultimately derived from the old improvised *commedia dell’arte*, the traditional theater of masks and clowns. Her sharp tongue is the source of a great deal of the fast-paced patter that made the comic style so irresistible.

Both scenes contain little arias for each of the characters and a culminating duet. In the first, the master frets and stewes over the maid’s insolent behavior, finally ordering Vespone to go out and find him a wife. Serpina orders Uberto to marry her; he won’t hear of it; she locks the doors to prevent Vespone from leaving, and the two of them erupt in sarcastic bickering. In the second, Serpina disguises Vespone as “Capitan Tempesta” (“Captain Storm”), her threatening bully of a fiancé, who is demanding from Uberto an impossible dowry. The only way out of a fight with the captain, she insinuates, is for him to agree to marry her himself. After a lot of coaxing and some agonized reflection, he gives in; Vespone removes his disguise; Uberto’s been had, but he’s happy. The newly engaged couple sing a duet of reconciliation.

Ex. 8-11 contains a sampling from the second half of the second intermezzo, beginning with Serpina’s coaxing aria,

"A Serpina penserete" ("Think of Serpina!"). She addresses Uberto to the strains of a melting *larghetto*; the repetitive bass, marking at least two cadences every measure, "truly" mimics the affection of cajolery. In between her approaches to Uberto, however, Serpina addresses us, the spectators, through ironic asides, set as perky little jigs of joy, in which she throws off her mask and revels in the effect she is having (Ex. 8-11a). This was a new dramatic situation for opera, and a new musical effect: contrast as irony—the very essence of comedy—replaces the "unity of affect" in which the *opera seria* had found its version of truth. Here we see the psychological, dramatic, and representational roots of the contrast-and-balance technique that became the universal stylistic medium of art music by century's end.

Uberto's little "tizzy aria," "Son imbrogliato io già" ("I'm really all snarled up"), is also full of irony. There is only one meter and tempo this time, but the whole joke of the piece lies in the contrast between his opening "fret motive" in eighth notes at a breakneck, practically unsingable tempo—a rapid-patter effect that became the very hallmark of the *basso buffo*—and his periodic attempts to take himself in hand, intoning in stately whole notes, "Uberto, pensa a te" (Uberto, think of yourself!), as if in ironic answer to Serpina. At those moments, the music slips into rather "distant" parallel-minor tonalities—another jokey contrast that became a standard operating procedure by century's end. A tantalizing question is whether there is any dramatic significance in the fact that the drolly repetitive cadential bass that underlies Uberto's fretting is the same as the one that underlaid Serpina's blandishments in the preceding aria. Or was it just a cliché of the style—one of the allurements that made it so popular and, for all its levity, so weighty in history?

The final lovers' duet, with its adorably silly imitations of Serpina's little heart-hammer and Uberto's thumping heart-drum, was originally composed for another opera of Pergolesi's—his last one, a full-length *commedia musicale* called *Il Flaminio*. Its passages in parallel thirds (that is, tenths) served as well as the original finale to symbolize the "harmonious" resolution of the little domestic farce, and by the 1750s it had already become customary to replace the original giguelike finale with this no less affectionate, but funnier, duet.

Largo
SERPINA

8

Ca-ra, ca-ra un tem-po, un tem-po, el-la mi fu, el-la mi
sweetest, kindest Ser-pin-a, so thought-ful: once she was mine, once she was

10 **Allegro**

ful Ei mi par che già pian pia-no s'in-co-
mine. I should say that he's be-com-ing sym-pa-

16

min-cia a in te-ne-rir
ther-ic-ly in-clined.

ex. 8-11a Giovanni Pergolesi, *La serva padrona*, Act II, Serpina's aria, mm. 8–18

Allegro
UBERTO

Son im - bro - glia - to j - o già, son im - bro - glia - to j - o
I'm real - ly caught in a mess, I'm real - ly caught in a

già, son im - bro - glia - to j - o già!
mess, I'm real - ly caught in a mess!

U - ber - to, pen - sa a te, pen - sa a te!
Um - ber - to, give it thought, give it thought.

ex. 8-11b Giovanni Pergolesi, *La serva padrona*, Act II, Uberto's aria, mm. 12–15, 31–39

This slightly revised version of *La serva padrona* was the one brought to Paris, along with Orlandini's *Giocatore* and a dozen other intermezzos and newfangled comic operas, by a troupe of *buffi* under the direction of a canny impresario named Eustachio Bambini, for a run beginning in August 1752. The furor they touched off with their performances, and the debates to which it led, had extraordinary repercussions in the French capital, and in all of its cultural satellites both in France and abroad. The so-called *Querelle des Bouffons* ("press controversy about the *buffi*" or, more literally, "War of the Buffoons"), with its stellar cast of characters, presaged not only musical but also social and political change.

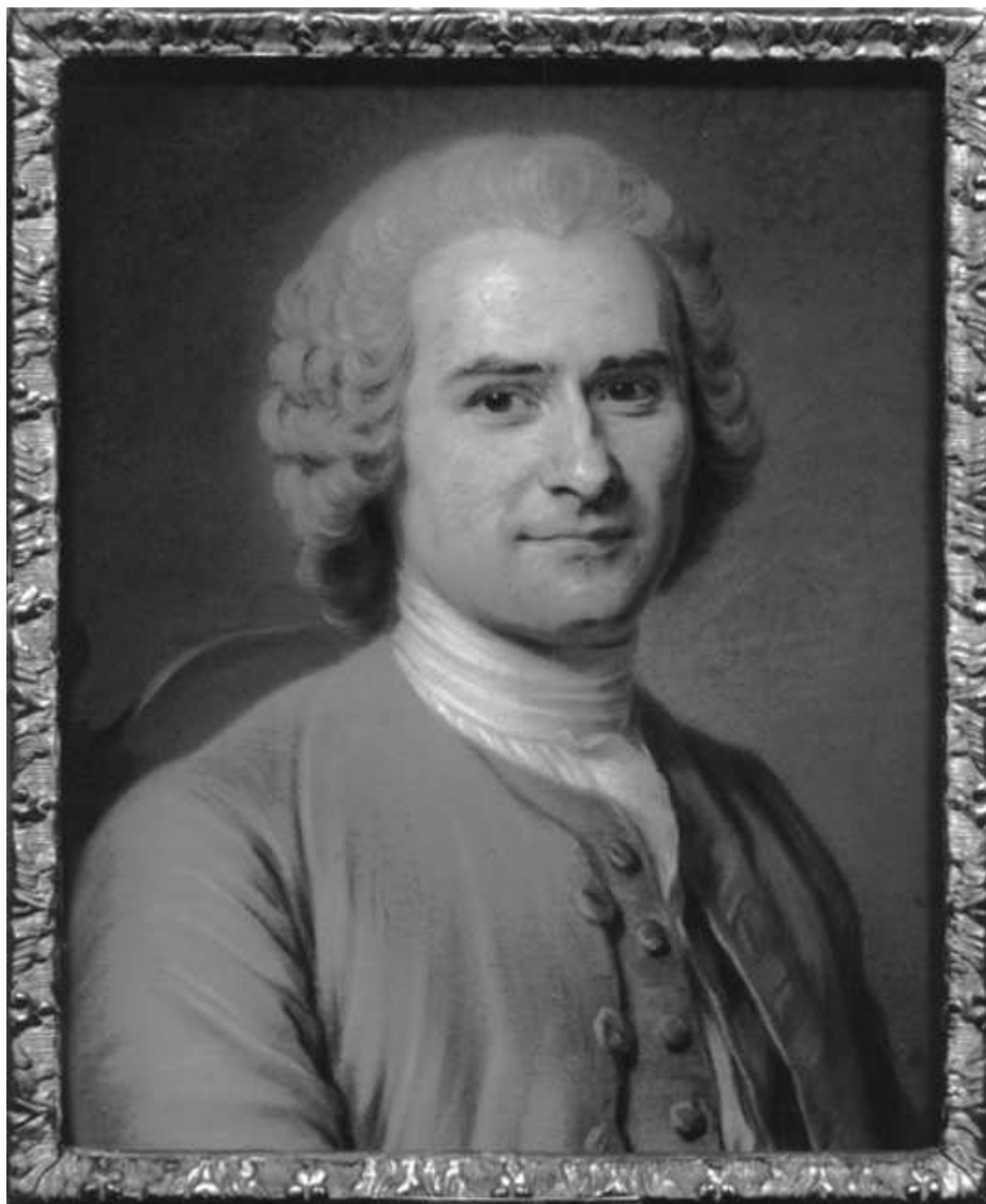


fig. 8-10 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, by Maurice Quentin de la Tour.

Press wars had always been a feature of France’s lively intellectual life. There had been one only shortly before between the “Lullistes” and the “Ramistes,” proponents of Lully’s and of Rameau’s operas. And there would be later ones too (including one to which we will have to pay attention, between the “Gluckistes” and the “Piccinnistes”). Always there were political and social subtexts, because under an absolute monarchy, where political, religious, and social issues could not be debated openly, they had to go underground, into highly suggestive and allusive art and literary criticism, among other things, for discussion. Such covert argumentation, often called “Aesopian discourse” because of the unstated but obvious “moral,” has been a feature of modern intellectual life in totalitarian societies ever since. A great deal of music criticism—and of music, too—has carried hidden messages since the eighteenth century, which, precisely because they are necessarily hidden, are ever subject to conflicting interpretation.

Diderot’s pamphlet, *Rameau’s Nephew*, which has already been quoted, may be viewed as an aftershock of the *Querelle des Bouffons*. One of the most powerful salvos was fired off by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, in a scathing “Letter on French Music,” published in November 1753, which elicited more than thirty rejoinders. Rousseau gave no quarter, ridiculing the *tragédies lyriques* performed by the royal musical establishment as stilted, labored, devoid of naturalness, ugly in harmony, and ungainly in prosody (text-setting). He went so far as to maintain that there was not and could not be such a thing as a truly French opera, for the phrase, he asserted, was a veritable contradiction in

terms.

An enthusiastic if rudimentarily trained amateur composer, Rousseau had geared up for his attack with a one-act "intermède" of his own, *Le devin du village* ("The Village Soothsayer"), composed in obvious emulation of the Italian intermezzos and performed at Fontainebleau, a Paris suburb, on 18 October 1752, only a couple of months after Bambini's *buffi* had made their début. Although written to a French text (his own), and in a style that recalled French folksongs (*pastourelles*) more than anything Italian, this was nevertheless "comic" music, intended as an object lesson to his musical countrymen.

Its typical pastoral plot, concerning the triumph of "natural" rustic virtue over courtly sophistication, was a somewhat more didactic version of the usual intermezzo triumph of pluck over rank. But it was Rousseau's only successful opera (previous attempts to write *tragédies lyriques* having brought him nothing but ridicule). It played both in France and abroad until the end of the century and even a little beyond. Despite its implied politics, its catchy tunes even made it a court favorite for a while. After hearing it, Louis XV was observed by his palace staff tunelessly humming the opening number (Ex. 8-12) for the rest of the day.

But Rousseau was much more than a musician. His appeals to natural virtue and his denigrations of the traditional musical repertoire of the royal court were linked: both were veiled expressions of his philosophical and political hostility to the monarchical order. Diderot, too, expressed otherwise unprintable liberal ideas through his fictionalized "nephew of Rameau," who wished to cast his detestable uncle's work wholesale into oblivion while reveling in "the modern style" of the Italians.

For "modern style" here, we can read "modern philosophy" between the lines. For the likes of Rousseau and Diderot, the *Querelle des Bouffons* was a covert forum for disseminating the complex of ideas now collectively referred to as "Enlightened." Rousseau came close to making all of this explicit in his *Confessions*, where he gloated that Bambini's *buffi* "struck a blow from which French opera never recovered." It could be claimed with equal (imperfect but pithy) justice that the *Querelle des Bouffons*, a long generation before the French revolution, struck the beginnings of a blow from which not only the *tragédie lyrique* but the absolutist monarchy itself never fully recovered.

14 COLETTE

J'ai per - du tout mon bon - heur, J'ai per -

17

du mon ser - vi - teur; Co - lin me dé -

20

lais - se, Co - lin me dé - lais - se.

ex. 8-12 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Le devin du village*, no. 1, "J'ai perdu mon serviteur"

But were Diderot's and Rousseau's reasons for welcoming the comic style the same as the average composer's? The average keyboard player's? The average concertgoer's or music buyer's? To what degree did the spread of the "comic style" in music coincide with, or even abet, the spread of Enlightened philosophy? Did the philosophy carry the music in tow? Or did the music carry the philosophy? These are questions that can hardly be answered with any precision. But the reality of the connection between the music and the philosophy, avidly acknowledged and as avidly resisted at the time, can hardly be denied.

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Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

CHAPTER 9 Enlightenment and Reform

The Operas Of Piccinni, Gluck, And Mozart

Chapter: CHAPTER 9 Enlightenment and Reform

Source: MUSIC IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

NOVELS SUNG ON STAGE

Throughout the eighteenth century, opera and its endless “reforms” continued to encode the social history of the age. That is why opera criticism so often makes good and exciting reading, even when the composers and the operas of which it treats have been long forgotten. Both by design and by its nature, it can mean far more than it says.

And again both by design and by its nature, the burgeoning comic opera continued to bear the heaviest freight of what is now called “subtext” (that is, the stuff you read between the lines) even as it continued to be “the best school for today’s composers,” in the words of the German musician Johann Adam Hiller (1728–1804), who reacted to it both as composer and as critic.¹ “Symphonies, concertos, trios, sonatas—all, nowadays, borrow something of its style,” Hiller wrote in 1768.

The composer whom Hiller had first in mind was his exact contemporary Niccolò Piccinni (1728–1800), who certainly qualifies today as “long forgotten.” In his day, however, Piccinni was not only a prominent figure but a controversial one as well. He became the focal point of a “cause” and, in his rivalry with the somewhat older (and today much better-remembered) Christoph Willibald Gluck (1714–87), the object of a *querelle*, a Parisian press war. The issues his career raised for contemporary audiences, critics, and composers continued to reverberate long after the decades of his greatest fame. They were issues of social as well as musical import.

The best way of approaching Piccinni’s “cause” and its social repercussions might be to note that his most famous opera, *La buona figliuola* (“The good little girl,” or “Virtuous maiden”), was one of the earliest to be based on a modern novel, then a new literary genre with distinct social implications of its own. The opera’s success was virtually unprecedented: between its Roman première (with an all-male cast) in 1760 and the end of the eighteenth century, *La buona figliuola* played every opera house in Europe, enjoying more than seventy productions in four languages.

Its plot came by way of Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded* (1740), a novel in the form of letters that tells of a chaste maidservant who so resourcefully resists the crass advances of her employer’s son that the young man finally falls seriously in love with her and marries her with his family’s blessing. *Pamela* achieved phenomenal popularity with a new class of readers, the same “bourgeois” readership that made the novel the paramount literary genre for centuries to come, and who were especially susceptible to Richardson’s idealistic moral: to wit, that natural virtues and emotions—pertinacity, honesty, love—can be practiced both high and low, and can level artificial barriers of rank.

This is only a variation, of course, on an ancient pastoral prototype, in which virtuous maids fend off or are rescued from lascivious aristocrats. But it was indeed a novel variation, and a telling one, this sentimental version in which the bar of class is actually overcome and maid and aristocrat find happiness together. For aristocrats, then, the moral “love conquers all” could be a socially ominous one. The eighteenth-century English novel was, among other things, a celebration—and, potentially, a breeding ground—of social mobility. The *Pamela* motif has been a stock-in-trade of bourgeois fiction ever since, though by now more a cliché of “romance novels” and soap operas (like *Our Gal Sunday*, a radio staple from the 1930s to the 1950s: “the program that asks the question, Can a young girl from a small mining town in West Virginia find happiness as the wife of a wealthy and titled Englishman?”) than of serious fiction.

Richardson’s novel was soon translated into Italian, and attracted the attention of Carlo Goldoni, whom we met briefly in the previous chapter as the chief librettist of the early *opera buffa*. Actually librettos were only a sideline

for Goldoni, the leading Italian dramatist of the century. His main mission in life, as he saw it, was replacing the old improvised *commedia dell'arte* with literary comedies that had fully worked-out scripts and modern realistic situations, worthy of comparison with Molière and Congreve, the mainstays of the French and English stage. Goldoni saw in *Pamela* the makings of a hit, but as often happened, some funny things happened to the story on its way to the stage.

The trouble was that an Italian audience would not have found the plot sufficiently believable. Nor could such a thing be shown in the theater, which, being a site of public assembly, was in Italy (as elsewhere) far more strictly policed by censors than the literary press. The sticking point was the happy ending—or rather, what made it happy. The elevation of a poor commoner through marriage was not possible in Italy. According to Italian law, such a marriage would bring about not the ennobling of the commoner but the disgrace and impoverishment of the noble.

Hence Goldoni was forced to find another motivation or excuse for the happy marriage. He found it in the device of mistaken identity: Pamela's father turns out to be not a poor schoolteacher but an exiled count, and so she can marry her noble lover with impunity. As Goldoni put it in the preface to his adaptation,

The reward of virtue is the aim of the English author; such a purpose would please me greatly, but I would not want the propriety of our Families to be altogether sacrificed to the merit of virtue. Pamela, though base-born and common, deserves to be wed by a Nobleman; but a Nobleman concedes too much to the virtue of Pamela if he marries her notwithstanding her humble birth. It is true that in London they do not scruple to make such marriages, and no law there forbids them; nevertheless it is true that nobody would want his son, brother, or relative to marry a low-born woman rather than one of his own rank, no matter how much more virtuous and noble the former.²

The emphasis was thus shifted away from the potential disruption of traditional social norms, but the satisfaction of natural love in a happy marriage was nevertheless retained, and the story could still capture the imaginations of idealistic lovers. Whereas we may think the device of mistaken identity a threadbare stratagem, in the context of eighteenth-century continental society and its rules, the device made the story more realistic and convincing, not less.

When Goldoni finally adapted his *Pamela* adaptation as an opera libretto, he had to make even more changes in order to satisfy the musical requirements of the opera stage. Now Pamela (rechristened La Cecchina) and her pursuer (Il Marchese della Conchiglia) are in love from the beginning, at first hopelessly. They are the main soprano/tenor pair, and sing duets. The Marchese's sister, Lucinda, also based on a Richardson character, is there to oppose the social mismatch. She is given a lover (Il Cavaliere Armidoro) who threatens her with rejection if her brother takes a common wife. There is a *basso buffo*, Mengotto, a gardener in love with Cecchina, and a sharp-tongued servant girl, Sandrina, in love with Mengotto. (She also gets a sidekick, Paoluccia, with whom she sings gossip patter duets.)

The last of the newly invented characters is the swashbuckling German mercenary soldier Tagliaferro, another *basso buffo* who gets wheezy laughs by mangling Italian. It is he who clears up the matter of Cecchina's parentage in the last scene. All the tangled pairs are sorted out, and multiple happy weddings are forecast: Cecchina with the Marchese; Lucinda with the Cavaliere; Mengotto with Sandrina. The libretto ends with an invocation to Cupid from all hands: "Come unite each loving heart,/ And may true lovers never part."

That would henceforth be the stock ending of the *buffa*, so that operas eventually divided into those in which people die (tragic) and those in which they marry (comic)—but both, increasingly, for love, not duty. That substitution was the great sentimental innovation and the great hallmark of "middle-class" (as opposed to aristocratic or "Family") values. It flew directly in the face of the *opera seria*, at first its chief competitor, which celebrated noble renunciation in dramas where people (or title characters, at any rate) neither died nor married. It marked the point at which the comic opera could begin to surmount the farce situations of the *intermezzos* and carry a serious or uplifting message of its own. That serious message was nothing less than a competing set of class aspirations—the aspirations of a self-made class whose power had begun to threaten that of hereditary privilege.

In Italian the new genre was eventually christened *semiseria*; in French, more revealingly, it was called *comédie larmoyante* ("tearful comedy"). In both, the happy end was reached by way of tears and therefore carried ethical weight. But instead of the weight of traditional social obligation, it was the weight of an implied injunction to be "authentic"—artlessly true to one's natural feelings. (And yet, as the opera historian William C. Holmes observes, the

Marchese nevertheless “seems quite relieved when, in the *dénouement*, Cecchina is revealed as a German baroness.”³) We know the device of mistaken identity the only way we can know it now—through a screen of cynical nineteenth-century satires (as in the operettas of Gilbert and Sullivan) that returned it to the realm of farce. Originally it was just as thrilling a concept as the intervention of a *deus ex machina* had been in an earlier age: it was the device through which the genre’s approved values—true love and artless virtue—could find their just reward.

For even though unwittingly a baroness by accident of birth, Cecchina is by nature and by her true character just “*una povera ragazza*,” a poor girl with a pure heart. The Italian phrase is the title of her main aria, the opera’s most famous number (Ex. 9-1a), in which she exposes that heart for all to see—or rather hear (its very beating is famously represented by the second violins)—since the music, as in any opera, is the ultimate arbiter of truth. The social idealism that was the essence of the *comédie larmoyante* is made explicit by Piccinni’s music and its canny contrast of styles. For Cecchina’s aria, with its folklike innocence, is immediately contrasted with one that depicts the artful scheming of Lucinda (Ex. 9-1b), who as a “noble” character is given all the appurtenances of an *opera seria* role—in particular the virtuoso coloratura style of singing, replete with melismas on emblematic words (in this case *disperato*, “hopeless”). Of course in this ironic context it is just the “noble” aspects of Lucinda’s music that cast her as ignoble, for she schemes to thwart the rightful consummation of true love. It is she, of course, who is thwarted in the end.

The image displays a musical score for Cecchina's aria, titled "CECCHINA". The score is written in a single system with two systems of music. The first system consists of a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line is in a treble clef with a key signature of one flat (B-flat) and a common time signature. The lyrics are: "U - na po - ve - ra ra - gaz - za, Padre e". The piano accompaniment features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes in the right hand and chords in the left hand. The second system continues the vocal line and piano accompaniment. The lyrics are: "ma - dre che non ha, Si mal-". The piano accompaniment continues with the same rhythmic pattern. The score is marked "sempre stacc." (sempre staccato).

trattata, sinistra-pazzia... Quest'è

The first system of the musical score features a vocal line in the upper staff and a piano accompaniment in the lower staves. The vocal line consists of eighth and sixteenth notes with lyrics 'trattata, sinistra-pazzia... Quest'è'. The piano accompaniment includes a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes in the right hand and chords in the left hand.

trop-pa, trop-pa, trop-pa crudel-rà,

The second system continues the vocal line with the lyrics 'trop-pa, trop-pa, trop-pa crudel-rà,'. The piano accompaniment features a more active right hand with sixteenth-note patterns and a steady bass line.

ex. 9-1a Niccolò Piccinni, *La buona figliuola*, “Una povera ragazza” (Act I, scene 12), mm. 5–9

LA MARCHESA

ah,— che mi accresce il fuoco un dispe-

-ra

The score for 'La Marchesa' includes a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line has lyrics 'ah,— che mi accresce il fuoco un dispe-' and '-ra'. The piano accompaniment features a prominent bass line with eighth-note patterns and a right hand with chords and triplets. Dynamics include *f* (forte) and *dim.* (diminuendo).

The image displays two systems of musical notation. The first system consists of a vocal line in the upper staff and a piano accompaniment in the lower staff. The vocal line features a melodic line with a series of eighth notes and a dotted quarter note, with a slur over the first two measures. The piano accompaniment consists of chords in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. The second system also has a vocal line and piano accompaniment. The vocal line has the lyrics 'to,' and a slur over the final two notes. The piano accompaniment includes the dynamic marking 'rinforzando' in the left hand, a fortissimo 'f' dynamic in the right hand, and a piano 'p' dynamic in the left hand.

ex. 9-1b Niccolò Piccinni, *La buona figliuola*, “Furie di donna irata” (Act I, scene 14), mm. 21–31

So even if it typically ended with a perfunctory nod at aristocratic propriety, the *comédie larmoyante* was a genre in which the bourgeoisie, the optimistic “self-made” class, glorified itself and celebrated its dream of limitless opportunity. It was no accident, then, that the prototype was English. Indeed, the spread of *Pamela*, and of *Pamela*-inspired spinoffs, into continental artistic consciousness is an index by which to measure the spread of bourgeois ideals. Aristocratic audiences, needless to say, found the genre insufferable, and it quickly became just as popular a target for lampooning as the *opera seria* had been. Indeed, the adjective *larmoyante*, which in normal usage is just as disparaging in its implications as the English “lachrymose,” was originally applied to the new genre by contemptuous aristocrats.

One aspect of comic opera, noticeable already in Pergolesi’s *Serva padrona*, received a notable boost from Piccinni in *La buona figliuola*. The shape of a comic libretto depended on a plot that is first hopelessly tangled, then sorted out. The musical shape of the opera followed and epitomized this plan in a fashion that set the comic genre completely apart from the contemporary *seria*. Both the tangle (*imbroglio*) and the sorting were symbolized in complex ensemble finales in which all the characters participated. In an intermezzo like *La serva padrona* these were mere duets. In full-length *opera buffa*, they could be scenes of great length and intricacy, in which the changing dramatic situation was registered by numbers following on one another without any intervening recitative, all to be played at a whirlwind pace that challenged any composer’s imaginative and technical resources. The first two acts of *La buona figliuola* end with quintets, the third and last with nothing less than an octet, representing the full cast of characters.

The second-act finale represents the height of *imbroglio*. Tagliaferro has just persuaded the ecstatic Marchese that Cecchina must be the lost baroness Mariandel on account of a distinctive blue birthmark on her breast. The Marchese rushes off to prepare their wedding forthwith, leaving Tagliaferro alone with the sleeping Cecchina. She calls tenderly in her sleep on her lost father. Tagliaferro, moved, responds in kind. Unfortunately this curious exchange is witnessed by Sandrina and Paoluccia. It is here that the finale begins.

At first it is dominated by the *buffi*, the characters most nearly recognizable from the earlier farce intermezzos like *La serva padrona*—namely Sandrina and Paoluccia, the sharp-tongued gossips, and Tagliaferro, the bumbling bass. They accuse him of trying to seduce Cecchina, and when the master returns (his entry underscored with a modulation to the subdominant), they denounce the hapless Tagliaferro. The Marchese, however, does not believe them, rejecting their malicious tale in a melting *siciliano* that expresses the purity of his love and faith. A quick change of tempo turns the *siciliano* into a madcap jig as the two girls argue back with the two men, finally reaching a

peak of frenzied raving that is captured musically in a breathless *prestissimo* (Ex. 9-2) that returns to the opening patter tune of the finale, thus tying the whole imbroglio into a tidy musical package.

CECCHINA

SANDRINA oh, che rab - bia ch'ho nel pet - to, che di - spet - to che mi

PAOLUCCIA oh, che rab - bia ch'ho nel pet - to, che di - spet - to che mi

II MARCHESE oh, che rab - bia ch'ho nel pet - to, che di - spet - to che mi

-rà, con - so - la - ta, for - tu - na - ta, la Cec - chi - na go - de -

TAGLIAFERRO -rà, con - so - la - ta, for - tu - na - ta, la Cec - chi - na go - de -

CECCHINA

fa, oh, che rab - bia ch'ho nel pet - to, che di - spet - to che mi fa,

SANDRINA

fa, oh, che rab - bia ch'ho nel pet - to, che di - spet - to che mi fa,

PAOLUCCIA

fa, oh, che rab - bia ch'ho nel pet - to, che di - spet - to che mi fa,

II MARCHESE

-rà, con - so - la - ta, for - tu - na - ta, la Cec - chi - na go - de - rà,

TAGLIAFERRO

-rà, con - so - la - ta, for - tu - na - ta, la Cec - chi - na go - de - rà,

ex. 9-2 Niccolò Piccinni, *La buona figliuola*, Act II finale

Notes:

- (1) Johann Adam Hiller, *Wöchentliche Nachrichten und Anmerkungen, die Musik betreffend*, Vol. III, p. 8 (22 August 1768), trans. Piero Weiss in P. Weiss and R. Taruskin, *Music in the Western World*, 2nd ed., pp. 239–40.
- (2) Carlo Goldoni, Preface to *La buona figliuola*, trans. Catherine Silberblatt Woflthl in the notes to Fonit Cetra LMA 3012 (Niccolò Piccinni, *La buuona figliola [sic]*), ca. 1981.
- (3) William C. Holmes, "Pamela Transformed," *Musical Quarterly* XXXVIII (1952): 589.

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Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

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Orfeo ed Euridice

Opera seria

Christoph Willibald Gluck

NOBLE SIMPLICITY

Chapter: CHAPTER 9 Enlightenment and Reform

Source: MUSIC IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

The *comédie larmoyante* was only one of many new departures in theater and theatrical music that burgeoned shortly after the middle of the eighteenth century. Another came to a head in an opera—ostensibly, an *opera seria*—that had its première performance in Vienna two years later than *La buona figliuola*, and is remembered today as the very model of “reform” opera, thanks to a deliberate propaganda campaign mounted on its behalf by the composer, the librettist, and their allies in the press. Although in many ways almost diametrically opposed to the style and the attitudes of Piccinni’s masterpiece of sentimental comedy, it embodied a similar infusion of what was known as “sensibility.” It too was in its way a quest for the “natural” and the “authentic.”

The opera was called *Orfeo ed Euridice*, a knowing retelling of the legend that had midwived the very birth of opera a century and a half before. The composer was Gluck, who was famous for declaring that when composing he tried hard to forget that he was a musician. What he meant by that, of course, was that he strove to avoid the sort of decorative musicality that called attention to itself—and away from the drama. The implicit target of Gluck’s reform, like that of the comic opera in all its guises, was the Metastasian *opera seria* and all its dazzling artifices.



fig. 9-1 Christoph Willibald Gluck, by Joseph Siffred Duplessis (1725–1802)

But where the *buffa*, as practiced by Piccinni, sought to replace those artifices with the “modern” truth of the sentimental novel, Gluck sought to replace them by returning to the most ancient, uncorrupted ways, as then understood. His was a self-consciously “neoclassical” art, stripped down and, compared with the *seria*, virtually denuded. In the preface to *Alceste* (1767), his second “reform” opera (based on a tragedy by Euripides), Gluck declared that in writing the music he had consciously aimed “to divest it entirely of all those abuses, introduced either by the mistaken vanity of singers or by the too great complaisance of composers, which have so long disfigured Italian opera and made the most splendid and most beautiful of spectacles the most ridiculous and wearisome,” just as his librettist, Ranieri Calzabigi, had sought to eliminate “the florid descriptions, unnatural paragons and sententious, cold morality” of the unnamed but obviously targeted Metastasio.⁴

Thus in place of the elaborate hierarchy of paired roles that Metastasio had decreed, Gluck’s *Orfeo* has only three characters—the title pair plus Cupid, the hero’s ally in his quest. The music they sing, despite the loftiness of the theme, is virtually devoid of the ritualized rhetoric of high passion—namely, the heroic coloratura that demanded the sort of virtuoso singing that had brought the *opera seria* its popular acclaim and its critical disrepute. That sort of musical “eloquence” was now deprecated as something depraved if not downright lubricious, and shed. Gluck’s “reform” was in fact a process of elimination.

Gluck's ideals, and (even more) his rhetoric, derived from the ideals and rhetoric of what in his day was called "the true style" by its partisans. (Only later, in the nineteenth century, was it labeled "neoclassic" or "classical," and then only to deride it). The high value of art, in this view, lay in its divine power, sadly perverted when art was used for purposes of display and luxury. The legitimate connection between this attitude and notions of classicism or antiquity came about as a result of contemporary achievements in archaeology (most spectacularly the unearthing of Herculaneum and Pompeii between 1738 and 1748) and the theories to which they gave rise.

The main theorizer was the German archaeologist and art historian Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717–68), Gluck's near-exact contemporary, whose most influential work in esthetics, *Thoughts on the Imitation of Greek Works*, appeared in 1755. The phrase he used to summarize the qualities in Greek art that he wanted to see imitated—"a noble simplicity and a calm grandeur" (*eine edle Einfalt und eine stille Grösse*)—became a watchword of the age, echoed and re-echoed in the writings of his contemporaries, including Gluck.

(There was a characteristic irony here, since many of the features of Greek art and architecture that Winckelmann most admired—its chaste "whiteness," for example—were the fortuitous products of time, not of the Greeks; we now know that the Athenian Parthenon, Winckelmann's very pinnacle of white plainness and truth, was actually painted in many colors back when it functioned as a temple rather than a "ruin." The "classicism" of the eighteenth century, a classicism of noble ruins, was in every way that very century's tendentious creation.)

Yet the heritage of the *opera seria* nevertheless survives in Gluck's *Orfeo*—most obviously in the language of the libretto, but also in the use of an alto castrato for the male title role, and in the high ethical tone that continues, newly purified and restored, to reign over the telling of the tale. Where Peri's or Monteverdi's Orpheus had looked back on Eurydice and lost her again out of sheer weakness (the inability to resist a spontaneous impulse), Gluck's hero does so out of stoic resolution and strength of character: in response to Eurydice's bewildered entreaties, Orpheus turns and looks to reassure her of his love, even though it means he must lose her. His act, in other words, has been turned into one of noble self-sacrifice: the classic *seria* culmination.

In other ways, the opera follows the conventions of the French *tragédie lyrique*, the majestic spectacle of the "ancient" and "divine" Lully, lately declared a classical model for imitation by French artists eager to relive the glorious achievements of the "grand siècle," the Great Age of Louis XIV. This unique mixture of what were normally considered inimical ingredients was typical of Gluck, the ultimate cosmopolitan. He had grown up in Austrian Bohemia. According to his pupil Antonio Salieri, his native language was Czech; "he expressed himself in German only with effort, and still more so in French and Italian.... Usually he mixed several languages together during a conversation."⁵ And so he did in his music, too.

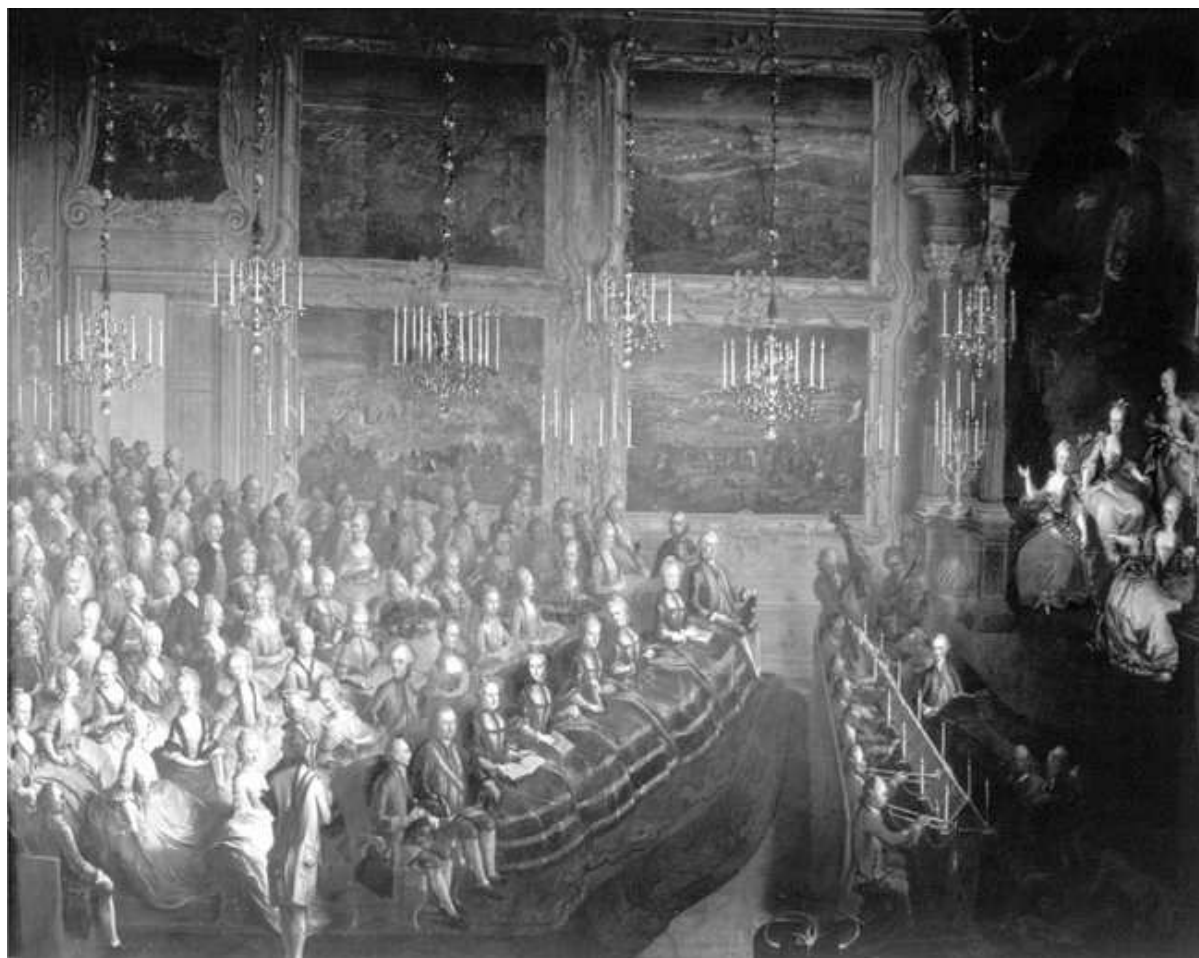


fig. 9-2 Gluck's *Il Parnasso confuso* as performed at the Schönbrunn Palace, Vienna, in 1765.

His early career was practically that of a vagabond: from Prague to Vienna, from Vienna to Milan (where he worked with Giovanni Battista Sammartini, one of the lions of the operatic stage), from Milan to London (where his operas failed, but where he met Handel), thence as far north as Copenhagen and as far south as Naples. By 1752 he had resettled in Vienna, where he worked mostly as staff composer for a troupe of French actors and singers for whom he composed ballets and *opéras comiques*. That is where he absorbed the idioms of French musical theater.

The *tragédie lyrique*, the type of French musical theater Gluck chose to emulate in *Orfeo*, was, as we know, the courtliest of all court operas, and it might seem that Gluck's reform was aimed in the opposite direction from Piccinni's innovations. It was to be a reassertion of the aristocratic values that the latter-day *seria* had diluted with singerly excess, the values that the *opera buffa* owed its very existence to deriding. Here the main impetus came from Gluck's librettist, Calzabigi, an Italian-born poet then resident in Vienna, who had boldly set himself up as rival to the lordly court poet Metastasio. Calzabigi had actually trained in Paris, where he had learned to value the "Greek" dancing-chorus manner of the French opera-ballet over "*i passaggi, le cadenze, i ritornelli* and all the Gothick, barbarous and extravagant things that have been introduced into our music" by the pleasure-loving, singer-pleasing Italians, as he put it in a memoir of his collaboration with Gluck, published years later in a French newspaper.⁶ (The English translation is by Dr. Burney.)

Thus the very first scene in the Gluck-Calzabigi *Orfeo* is a very formal choral elegy, sung by Orpheus's entourage of nymphs and shepherds, that corresponds roughly with the one at the end of the second act of Monteverdi's *Orfeo*. Eurydice is already dead. The horrifying news of her demise and Orpheus's reaction to it, so central to Monteverdi's confrontational drama, is dispensed with so far as the spectacle is concerned. This will be an opera of reflection—of moods savored and considered, not instantaneously experienced.

The aim of austerity—of striking powerfully and deep with the starkest simplicity of means—is epitomized by the role of Orpheus in this first scene. His whole part amounts to nothing more than three stony exclamations of Eurydice's name—twelve notes in all, using only four pitches (Ex. 9-3). It would be hard to conceive of anything

more elemental, more drastically “reduced to essentials.” Gluck once advised a singer to cry the name out in the tone of voice he’d use if his leg were being sawn off—Diderot’s “animal cry of passion” in the most literal terms.

The image shows a page of a musical score for Christoph Willibald Gluck's opera *Orfeo ed Euridice*. The title "ORPHEUS" is centered at the top. The score is for a chorus and includes parts for Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass, along with a piano accompaniment. The lyrics are in Italian. The first system shows the vocal parts with the lyrics "Eu - ri - che do - len - ti si spar - gon per te." The second system shows the vocal parts with the lyrics "di - cet: Ed a - scol - ta il tuo spo - so in - fe - li - ce." The piano accompaniment consists of chords and a simple bass line.

ex. 9-3 Christoph Willibald Gluck, *Orfeo ed Euridice*, Act I, scene 1, chorus, recitative and pantomime

Orpheus then sends his mourning friends away in a grave recitative, whereupon they take their ceremonious leave of him through another round of gravely eloquent song and dance *à la française*. Orpheus’s recitative is accompanied by the orchestral strings with all parts written out, not just a figured bass. “Accompanied” or “orchestrated recitative” (*recitativo accompagnato* or *stromentato*) had formerly been reserved for just the emotional highpoints of the earlier *seria*, to set these especially fraught moments off from the libretto’s ordinary dialogue, for which ordinary or “simple” recitative—*recitativo semplice*, later known as *recitativo secco* or “dry” recitative—would have sufficed. In Gluck’s opera, there was to be no “ordinary” dialogue, only dialogue fraught heavily with sentiment, hence no *recitativo semplice*, only *stromentato*.

As a result, *Orfeo ed Euridice* became the first opera that can be performed without the use of any continuo-realizing instruments. Considering that the basso continuo and the opera itself arose side by side as kindred responses to the same esthetic ferment, there could hardly be any greater “reform” of the medium than this. Paradoxically, the

elimination of the continuo had the same purpose as its invention: to adapt an existing (but constantly changing) medium to ever greater, and ever more naturalistic, expressive heights.

The same combination of high pathos and avoidance of conventional histrionics characterizes both of Orpheus's arias. The one in the third act, which takes place after Eurydice's second death, was very aptly described by Alfred Einstein, an admiring biographer of the composer, as "the most famous and most disputed number of the whole opera," possibly of all opera (Ex. 9-4).⁷ Orpheus sings in grief—but in a noble, dignified grief that is in keeping with the nobility of his deed. That nobility and resignation constitute the aria's dominant affect, expressed through a "beautiful simplicity" (*bella semplicità*) of musical means, as Gluck put it (after Winckelmann, with Calzabigi's help) in the preface to *Alceste*. And that meant no Metastasian similes, no roulades, no noisy exits—for such things only exemplified pride.

ORPHEUS

Che fa - rò sen - za Eu - ri - di - ce, do - ve an -

drò sen - za il mio ben! che — fa -

rò, do - ve an - drò, che fa - rò sen - za il mio -

ben, do - ve an - drò sen - za il mio - ben?

J'ai perdu mon Eurydice,
Rien n'égale mon malheur,
Sort cruel, quelle rigueur,
Je succombe à ma douleur.

I've lost my Eurydice,
Nothing can equal my sorrow;
O cruel fate, what hardship,
I give myself up to despair.

ex. 9-4 Christoph Willibald Gluck, *Orfeo ed Euridice*, Act III, scene 1: "Che farò senza Euridice?", refrain, mm. 7-16

The structure of the aria is French, not Italian: a *rondeau* with a periodic vocal refrain, not a *da capo* with an orchestral ritornello. The episodes between refrains are set in related keys—the dominant, the parallel minor—so that the return is always a refreshment. That and the shapely C-major melody of the refrain are what have given rise to the "dispute" to which Einstein referred—a dispute between those who have found its "beautiful simplicity" simply too beautiful (and not expressive enough), and those who have seen in it the ultimate realization of music's power of transcendence.

The French composer Pascal Boyé, a friend of Diderot, used the aria as ammunition for a treatise entitled *L'expression musicale mise au rang des chimères* ("Musical expression exposed as an illusion"). Citing the aria by the opening words of the French version première in Paris in 1774—"J'ai perdu mon Eurydice!" (I've lost my Eurydice!)—Boyé commented drily that the melody would have served as well or better had the text read "I've found my Eurydice!"⁸ Nearly a century later, the critic Eduard Hanslick tried to generalize this remark of Boyé's and apply it to all music. "Take any dramatically effective melody," he suggested:

Form a mental image of it, separated from any association with verbal texts. In an operatic melody, for instance one that had very effectively expressed anger, you will find no other intrinsic expression than that of a rapid, impulsive motion. The same melody might just as effectively render words expressing the exact opposite, namely, passionate love.⁹

And so on. Gluck would surely have found this notion bizarre, and might well have attributed it to the inability of "bourgeois" ears to appreciate a noble simplicity of utterance, awaiting completion (as Boyé recognized, but not Hanslick) by the expressivity of the singer's voice and manner. The singer for whom the aria was written, it so happens, is one whom we have already met—Gaetano Guadagni, for whom, a dozen years before, Handel had revised *Messiah* for showy "operatic" effect. Over that time Guadagni had transformed himself into a paragon of nobly

simple and realistic acting under the influence of David Garrick, the great Shakespearean actor, with whom he had worked in London and whose then revolutionary methods of stage deportment he had learned to emulate. These, too, could be described with the phrase *bella simplicità*. A comparison of Handel's revised "But who may abide" (Ex. 7-6b) and Gluck's *Che farò senza Euridice?*, both written for Guadagni, makes a good index of simplicity's ascendancy. It was resisted by many among the aristocracy, however, who associated "natural" acting and stage deportment with comedy, and therefore with a loss of high "artfulness."

Notes:

(4) Christoph Willibald Gluck, Preface to *Alceste*, trans. Piero Weiss in P. Weiss and R. Taruskin, *Music in the Western World*, 2nd ed., pp. 254–55.

(5) I. F. Edlen von Mosel, *Ueber das Leben und die Werke des Anton Salieri, K. k. Hofkapellmeister* (Vienna, 1827), p. 93; trans. Daniel Hertz in "Coming of Age in Bohemia: The Musical Apprenticeships of Benda and Gluck," *Journal of Musicology* VI (1988): 524.

(6) Ranieri de Calzabigi, "Lettre au rédacteur du Mercure de France" (signed 25 June 1784), *Mercure de France*, 21 August 1784.

(7) Alfred Einstein, *Gluck*, trans. Eric Blom (London: Dent, 1936), p. 82.

(8) M. Boyé, *L'Expression musicale, mise au rang des Chimères* (Amsterdam, 1779), p. 14.

(9) Eduard Hanslick, *On the Musically Beautiful (Vom Musikalisch-Schönen, 1854)*, trans. Geoffrey Payzant (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1986), pp. 16–17.

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Tragédie lyrique

Gluck: Italian reform operas

ANOTHER QUERELLE

Chapter: CHAPTER 9 Enlightenment and Reform

Source: MUSIC IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

Piccinni's rustic sentiment and Gluck's classical simplicity, though the one was directed at a bourgeois audience and the other at an aristocratic one, were really two sides of the same naturalistic coin. Both were equally, though differently, a sign of the intellectual, philosophical, and (ultimately) social changes that were taking place over the course of the eighteenth century. The famous rivalry that marked (or marred) their later careers might thus seem entirely gratuitous and therefore ironic from our historical vantage point. But although the two composers could have had no inkling of it in the 1760s, when they first became international celebrities, they were on a collision course.

Gluck naturally gravitated toward Paris, the half-forgotten point of origin for most of his innovatory departures. Having Gallicized the *opera seria*, he would now try his hand at the real thing—actual *tragédies lyriques*, some of them to librettos originally prepared as much as ninety years earlier for Lully. He arrived in the French capital in 1773 at the invitation of his former singing pupil in Vienna, none other than the princess Marie-Antoinette, the eighteen-year-old wife of the crown prince (*dauphin*) who the next year would be crowned Louis XVI (“Louis the last,” as it turned out).

Under Marie-Antoinette's protection, Gluck at first enjoyed fantastic success. He even got old Rousseau to recant the brash claim he had made twenty years before, in the heat of buffoon-battle. After seeing *Iphigénie en Aulide*, Gluck's first *tragédie lyrique*, on a much-softened libretto after Euripides's bloody tragedy of sacrifice (adapted by Jean Racine), Rousseau confessed to Gluck that “you have realized what I held to be impossible to this very day”—namely, a viable opera on a French text.¹⁰ The irony was that the same stylistic mixture that had spelled “Gallic” reform of Italian opera in Vienna was now read by the French as a revitalizing Italianization of their own heritage. Only a Bohemian—a complete outsider to both proud traditions—could have brought it off.

The best symbol of this hybridization of idioms was *Orphée et Eurydice*, a new version of Gluck's original “reform” opera, which amounted to a French readaptation of what had already been a Gallicized version of *opera seria*. Besides translating the libretto, this meant recasting the male title role so that an *haut-contre*, a French high tenor, could sing it instead of a castrato. Gluck also added some colorfully orchestrated instrumental interludes portraying the beauties of the Elysian fields, which are now performed no matter which version of the opera is employed.

In the summer of 1776, Gluck learned that the Neapolitan ambassador had summoned Piccinni to Paris for no other purpose than to be Gluck's rival, and had even “leaked” to him a copy of the very libretto Gluck was then working on (*Roland*, adapted from a *tragédie lyrique* formerly set by Lully, with a plot taken from French medieval history). Gluck, mortified, pulled out of the project, feeling with ample justification that he was being set up for a flop. “I feel certain,” he wrote to one of his old librettists after burning what he'd written of the opera, “that a certain Politician of my acquaintance will offer dinner and supper to three-quarters of Paris in order to win fans for M. Piccinni....”¹¹ A couple of years later, though, it happened again, when Piccinni was induced to write an opera on the same story (albeit to a different libretto) as Gluck's last Parisian offering, a mythological tragedy loosely based on *Iphigenia in Tauris*, a famous play by Euripides whose story had already furnished the plot for quite a number of operas. The two settings were performed two years apart, Gluck's in 1779 and Piccinni's in 1781.

Their partisans (especially Jean François Marmontel, Piccinni's French librettist and sponsor) worked hard to cast the two composers as polar opposites—Gluck as the apostle of “dramatic” opera, Piccinni of “musical.” Compared with the *Querelle des Bouffons*, however, the *querelle des Gluckistes et Piccinistes* was just a tempest in a teapot. The

stakes, for one thing, were much lower. The main battle—the “noble simplification” and sentimentalization of an encrusted court art—was won before this later quarrel even started, and its protagonists, privately on friendly terms, were more nearly allies than rivals.

Notes:

(10) J. J. Rousseau, *Extrait d'une réponse du petit faiseur à son prête-nom, sur un morceau de l'Orphée de M. le chevalier Gluck* (Geneva, 1781).

(11) Letter from Gluck to François Louis Du Roullet, in *L'Année littéraire*, 1777; quoted in Einstein, *Gluck*, pp. 146–47.

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Enlightenment

Philosophy of Music: Kant: judgment, imagination and music

WHAT WAS ENLIGHTENMENT?

Chapter: CHAPTER 9 Enlightenment and Reform

Source: MUSIC IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

So perhaps it is from the operatic masterpieces of the age that we can best learn an important lesson: it is a considerable distortion of the way things were to describe the so-called Enlightenment exclusively as an “age of reason”—especially if we persist in assuming (as the romantics would later insist) that thinking and feeling, “mind” and “heart,” are in some sense opposites. Gluck and Puccini show us how far from true this commonly accepted dichotomy really is. The impulse that had led them and their artistic contemporaries to question traditional artifice and attempt the direct portrayal of “universal” human nature was equally the product of “free intellect” and *sympathy*—community in feeling. This last was based on introspection—“looking within.” The community it presupposed and fostered was one that in principle embraced the whole of humanity regardless of race, gender, nationality, or class. The objective of “enlightened” artists became, in Wye J. Allanbrook’s well-turned phrase, “to move an audience through representations of its own humanity.”¹² And not only move, but also instruct and inspire goodness: free intellect and introspective sympathy went hand in hand—or in a mutually regulating tandem—as ministers to virtue.

The notion of free intellect—or “Common Sense,” as the American revolutionary Thomas Paine put it in the title of his celebrated tract of 1776—was the one that tended to attract attention by dint of its novelty and its political implications. “Man is born free; and everywhere he is in chains,” wrote Rousseau at the beginning of his *Social Contract* (1762), perhaps the most radical political work of the eighteenth century, and the obvious source of Paine’s main ideas. The chains to which he referred were not only the literal chains of enforced bondage, but also intellectual chains that people voluntarily (or so they may think) assume: religious superstition, submission to time-honored authority, acquiescence for the sake of social order or security in unjust or exploitative social hierarchies. The remedy was knowledge, which empowered an individual to act in accord with rational self-interest and with the “general will” (*sensus communis*) of similarly enlightened individuals.

Dissemination of knowledge—and with it, of freedom and individual empowerment—became the great mission of the times. The most concrete manifestation of that mission was the *Encyclopédie*, the mammoth encyclopedia edited by Diderot and Jean d’Alembert with help from a staff of self-styled *philosophes* or “lovers of knowledge” including Rousseau, who wrote the music articles among others. The first volume appeared in 1751, and the final supplements were issued in 1776. By the end, the project had been driven underground, chiefly by the Jesuits, who were enraged at its religious skepticism and persuaded the government of Louis XV to revoke the official “patent” or license to print. Even the clandestine volumes were subjected to unofficial censorship by the printer, who in fear of reprisal deleted the most politically inflammatory passages. These embattled circumstances only enhanced the prestige of the *Encyclopédie*, giving it a heroic aura as a new forbidden “Tree of Knowledge,” and contributing to its enormous cultural and political influence.

That influence can be gauged by comparison with the famous essay *Was ist Aufklärung?* (“What Is Enlightenment?”) by the German philosopher Immanuel Kant. It was published in 1784, eight years after the *Encyclopédie* was completed. The answer to the question propounded by the title took the form of a popular Latin motto, originally from Horace: *Sapere aude!* (“Dare to know!”).¹³ “Enlightenment,” Kant declared, “is mankind’s exit from its self-incurred immaturity,” defined as “the inability to make use of one’s own understanding without the guidance of another.”

“Enlightened” ideas quickly spread to England as well, where free public discussion of social and religious issues—both in the press and also orally, in meeting places like coffee houses—was especially far advanced. From

England, of course, they spread to the American colonies, as already suggested by comparing Rousseau and Paine. Whether or not (as often claimed in equal measure by its proponents and detractors) the Enlightenment led directly to the French revolution of 1789, with its ensuing periods of mob rule, political terror, and civil instability, there can be no doubt that it provided the intellectual justification for the American revolution of 1776—a revolution carried out on the whole by prosperous, enterprising men of property and education, acting in their own rational and economic self-interest. The Declaration of Independence, and the American Constitution that followed, can both be counted as documents of the Enlightenment. As mediated through two centuries of amendment and interpretation, moreover, the American Constitution, as a legal instrument that is still in force, represents the continuing influence of the Enlightenment in the politics and social philosophy of our own time.

It would be wrong, however, to think of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment within its own time as nothing but a vehicle of civic unrest or rebellion. The *philosophes* themselves believed in strong state power and saw the best realistic hope of freedom in the education of “enlightened despots” who would rule rationally, with enlightened sympathy for the interests of their subjects. A number of European sovereigns were indeed sympathetic to the aims of the Encyclopedists. Frederick II (“the Great”) of Prussia—C. P. E. Bach’s employer and a great patron of the arts and sciences, many of which (including flute-playing and even musical composition) he practiced himself—corresponded with Voltaire (François Marie Arouet, 1694–1778), the “godfather” of the Enlightenment, and entertained d’Alembert at Sans Souci (“Without-a-Care”), his pleasure palace in Potsdam. Catherine II (“the Great”), the German-born Empress of Russia and a protégée of Frederick’s, corresponded enthusiastically with Diderot himself, whose much-publicized praise of Catherine and her liberality was largely responsible for her flattering sobriquet.

The liberality of an autocrat had its limits, though. Kant was a bit cynical about Frederick’s: “Our ruler,” he wrote, “says, ‘*Argue* as much as you want and about whatever you want, but *obey!*’”¹⁴ And after the French revolution, which Frederick did not live to see, his protégée Catherine turned quite reactionary and imprisoned many Russian followers of her former correspondents.

The prototype of all the “enlightened despots” of eighteenth-century Europe was the Austrian monarch, Joseph II (reigned 1765–90). Beginning in 1780, when he came to full power on the death of his mother, the co-regent Maria Theresia, Joseph instituted liberal reforms on a scale that seemed to many observers positively revolutionary in their extent and speed. He wielded the powers of absolutism, just as the *philosophes* had envisaged, with informed sympathy for the populace of his lands. He annulled hereditary privileges, expropriated church properties and extended freedom of worship, and instituted a meritocracy within the empire’s civil service. Above all, he abolished serfdom. (Catherine, by contrast, notoriously extended the latter institution into many formerly nonfeudalized territories of the Russian empire.) Yet few of Joseph’s reforms outlived him, largely because his brother and successor, Leopold II, was impelled, like Catherine, into a reactionary stance by the revolutionary events in France, and Leopold’s successor Francis II (reigned 1792–1835) created what amounted to the first modern police state. This anxious response to the French Revolution on the part of formerly “enlightened” autocrats is one of many reasons for regarding the political legacy of that great historical watershed as ambiguous at best.

Notes:

(12) Wye J. Allanbrook, *Rhythmic Gesture in Mozart* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 16.

(13) Immanuel Kant, “An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?” (*Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?*, 1784), trans. James Schmidt, in *What is Enlightenment? Eighteenth-Century Answers and Twentieth-Century Questions*, ed. J. Schmidt (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), p. 58.

(14) Kant, “An Answer,” trans. Schmidt, p. 59.

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MOZART

Chapter: CHAPTER 9 Enlightenment and Reform

Source: MUSIC IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

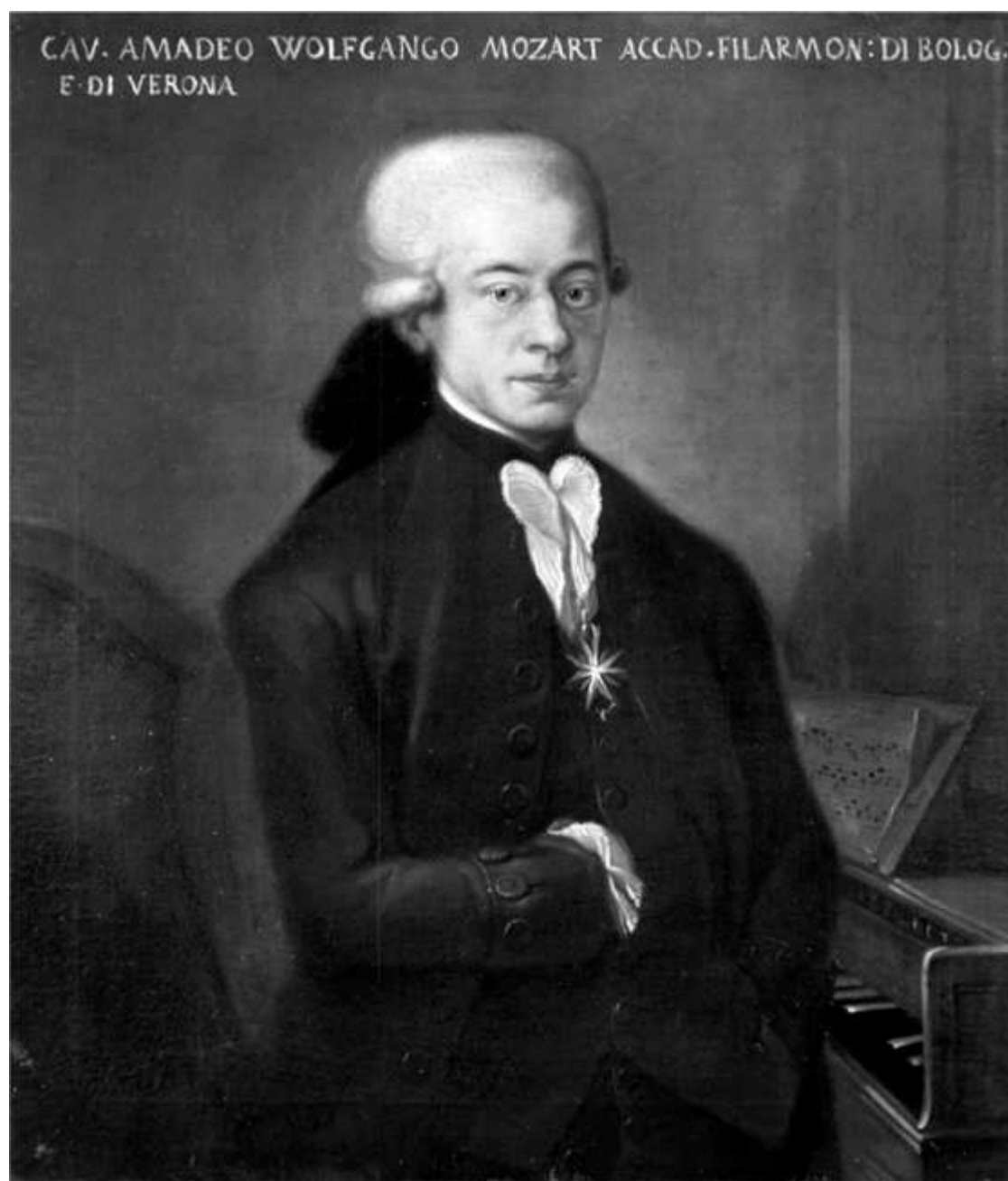


fig. 9-3 Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart.

Joseph II was not a great patron of the arts. His sociopolitical reforms were his all-consuming interest, leaving little room for entertainment or intellectual pursuits. Music historians have tended to despise him a bit, because of his failure to give proper recognition or suitable employment to Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–91), the great musical

genius of the age, whose music often perplexed him. (Joseph II is now best remembered by musicians not for his heroic reforms but rather for telling Mozart one day that there were “too many notes” in one of his scores.) But in fact Josephine Vienna, where Mozart made his home in the last decade of his life, and to whose musical commerce he made an outstanding contribution despite his failure to achieve a court sinecure, provides an ideal lens through which to view the work of one of European music’s great iconic figures in a truly relevant—and “enlightening”—cultural context.

Posterity has turned Mozart into an “icon”—the “image of music,” replete with an aura of holiness—for many reasons. One was his phenomenal precociousness; another was his heartbreaking premature demise. These as-if-correlated facts have long since converted his biography into legend. His earliest surviving composition, an “Andante pour le clavecin” in his sister Nannerl’s notebook, was composed just after his fifth birthday (if his father, who inscribed the little harpsichord piece, can be believed). His last, as fate would have it, was a Requiem Mass, on which he was still working when he died, just 30 years, 10 months, and one week later. In that short span Mozart managed to compose such a quantity of music that it takes a book of a thousand pages—the *Chronological-Thematic Catalogue* by Ludwig Köchel, first published in 1862 and now in its seventh revised edition—just to list it adequately. And that quantity is of such a quality that the best of it has long served as a standard of musical perfection.



fig. 9-4 Mozart as a boy in Salzburg court uniform.

Mozart was born in Salzburg, an episcopal city-state near the Bavarian border, where his father, Leopold Mozart, served as deputy music director in the court of the Prince-Archbishop. By 1762, when the child prodigy was six years old, his father relinquished most of his duties and gave up his own composing career so that he could not only see properly to his son's musical education but also begin displaying his astonishing gifts to all the courts and musical centers of Europe. By the age of ten the boy Mozart was famous, having performed at courts throughout the German Catholic territories, the Netherlands, Paris, and finally London, where he stayed for more than a year, was fêted at the court of George III, became friendly with John Christian Bach, and submitted, at his father's behest, to a series of scientific tests by the physician and philosopher Daines Barrington, to prove that the boy truly was a prodigy and not a musically accomplished dwarf. Barrington's report, "Account of a Very Remarkable Musician," read at the Royal Society, a prestigious scientific association, marked an important stage in the formation of the Mozart legend, the "myth of the eternal child," as Maynard Solomon, the author of an impressive psychological biography of the composer, has called it.¹⁵

It is because of his uncanny gifts and his famously complicated relations with his father that Mozart has been the frequent subject of fiction, dramatization, "psychobiography," and sheer rumor (including the persistent legend of his death by poisoning at the hand of Gluck's pupil Salieri, a jealous rival). Before Solomon's sober psychological study there was a reckless one by the Swiss novelist Wolfgang Hildesheimer, not to mention Alexander Pushkin's verse drama "Mozart and Salieri" of 1830 and its subsequent Broadway adaptation by Peter Shaffer as *Amadeus*, later a popular movie. But Mozart's iconic status was also due to his singular skill at "moving an audience by representations of its own humanity." His success at evoking sympathy through such representations has kindled interest in his own human person to an extent to that point unprecedented in the history of European music, partly because the creation of bonds of "brotherhood" through art had never before been so central an artistic aim.

It is also for this reason that Mozart's music, in practically every genre that he cultivated, has been maintained in an unbroken performing tradition from his time to ours; he is the true foundation of the current "classical" repertoire, and has been that ever since there has been such a repertoire (that is, since the period immediately following his death). Except for Handel's oratorios, nothing earlier has lasted in this way. Franz Joseph Haydn, Mozart's great contemporary, whom we will meet officially in the next chapter, has survived only in part. (His operas, for example, have perished irrevocably from the active repertoire.) Bach, as we know, returned to active duty only after a time underground.

Mozart's operas have not only survived where Haydn's have perished. A half dozen of them (roughly a third of his output in the genre) now form the earliest stratum of the standard repertory. But for the Orfeos of Monteverdi and Gluck, they are the earliest operas now familiar to theatergoers. They sum up and synthesize all the varieties of musical theater current in the eighteenth century, as we have traced them to this point, and they have been a model to opera composers ever since.

Mozart composed his first dramatic work, a rather offbeat intermezzo composed to a libretto in Latin (!) for performance at the University of Salzburg, at the age of eleven, shortly after returning from London. It is a mere curiosity, like the composer himself at that age. Within a couple of years, however, Mozart was equipped to turn out works of fully professional calibre in all the theatrical genres then current. In 1769, the thirteen-year-old's first opera buffa, *La finta semplice* ("The pretended simpleton"), to a libretto by Carlo Goldoni, was performed at the Archbishop's Palace in Salzburg. (An earlier scheduled performance at Vienna was cancelled on suspicion that the opera was really by father Leopold.) Its style is most often compared with that of Piccinni. About eighteen months later, in December 1770, Mozart's first *opera seria*, called *Mitridate, re di Ponto* ("Mithridates, King of Pontus"), to a libretto based on a tragedy of self-sacrifice by Racine, was produced in Italy, opera's home turf, where the Mozarts, father and son, were touring. It was so successful that the same theater, that of the ducal court of Milan, commissioned two more *serie* from the boy genius over the next two seasons. Another early success was *Bastien und Bastienne*, a *singspiel* (a German comic opera with spoken dialogue) based loosely on the libretto of Rousseau's popular *Devin du village*, which was performed, possibly as early as the fall of 1768 when the composer was twelve, at the luxurious home of Franz Mesmer, the pioneer of "animal magnetism" or (as we would now call it) hypnotherapy.

These three—Italian opera both tragic and comic, and German vernacular comedy—were the genres that Mozart would cultivate for the rest of his career. What his early triumphs demonstrated above all was his absolute mastery of the conventions associated with all three: a mastery that enabled him eventually to achieve an unprecedented directness of communication that still moves audiences long after the conventions themselves have been outmoded.

Mastery, rather than originality, was the objective all artists then strove to achieve. The originality we now perceive in Mozart was really a secondary function or by-product of a mastery so consummately internalized that it liberated his imagination to react with seeming spontaneity to the texts he set and achieve a singularly sympathetic “representation of humanity.”

Notes:

(15) See Maynard Solomon, “Mozart: The Myth of the Eternal Child,” *19th Century Music* XV (1991–2): 95–106; incorporated in Solomon, *Mozart: A Life* (New York: HarperCollins, 1995).

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