

SOME REMARKS BY THE ARTIST, Mahan Esfahani

There is a joke amongst organists in England about history's greatest composer, J.S. Bach, running something to this effect: 'Bach - a composer about whom one must have an opinion.' In the search for historically-informed performances of the music of J.S. Bach, the sniffy dogmas that define most of our approach to his music need not occupy us long when considering the question of instrumentation. Not only do we have only but some rather foggy ideas of what instruments the composer would have played, but even Bach himself was not above engaging in the time-honoured tradition of transcription. Take, for instance, the keyboard concerti based on originals for violin, or the very fact that Bach's abstract musical conceptions sometimes seem to stretch the limits of any performing media. The first two works on this evening's programme, reflect this rich technique transcription and, as it were, this 'multimedia' conception of music that was a crucial part of seventeenth-and eighteenth-century artistic thought. The Adagio in G (BWV 968) is a written transcription of the third movement from the Sonata BWV 1005 in C-Major for unaccompanied violin. Whether this actual version was written by Bach himself is open to question, but the idea of playing a solo violin movement on the keyboard is corroborated by testimony from his student Johann Agricola, who many years after his master's death wrote of Bach's playing of the violin solo works on the keyboard: 'Ihr Verfasser spielte sie selbst oft auf dem Clavichord, and fuegte von Harmonie so viel dazu bey, als er fuer noethig befand' ('The composer often played them [the violin solo works] on the clavichord, and of harmony added as much as he found necessary'). Indeed, the work is quite full of this 'Harmonie' - firstly, it has been transcribed a fourth lower into the key of G, perhaps to take advantage of the rich sonority of the harpsichord's lower register, and chromaticisms and full harmonic clashes, only barely suggested by the violin original, enrich the spirit of the piece (Fig. 1). Interestingly, this is the only movement of BWV 1005 which has come down to us in a keyboard transcription, but it is very well possible that the whole work was transcribed at some point. The composer and critic Johann Matheson, a contemporary of Bach's and a close friend of Handel's, in the course of an article praising the economy and conciseness of Bach's fugal subjects, quoted the subject of the second movement of BWV 1005, but in G-Major rather than in C-Major. Is it possible that it was in the transcribed form that the work was disseminated amongst musical connoisseurs in Bach's circles and their associates?

The Praeludium, Fuga, & Allegro in E-flat (BWV 998) is referred to in the autograph manuscript as 'Prelude pour la Luth o Cembal' (prelude for the lute or harpsichord), and may have even been written for a harpsichord with gut strings, known as a Lautenwerk, of which the inventory made after Bach's death lists two examples. Bach himself seems to have been involved in the instrument's conception, for the same Agricola later recalled 'a lute harpsichord designed by Mr. Johann Sebastian Bach and executed by Mr. Zacharias Hildebrandt, which was of smaller size than an ordinary harpsichord.' It has been argued that the difficulties in lute performance of the piece decisively point to it have been composed for the keyboard, but the fugue in particular is unlike Bach's other keyboard works - the texture is essentially sparse, and the range is relatively narrow, suggesting that Bach may have simply intended to write a piece transferable to either medium as implied by the title written in the autograph. Another unique aspect of the fugue is its recapitulatory form (ABA), again much unlike Bach's other 'through-composed' fugal efforts; this has called into question whether Bach was even the composer of the work. Recently, the Irish musicologist Ann Leahy has proposed a reading of BWV 998 that sees the work as an expression of Bach's deep faith. For example, the first movement is written in the metre of 12/8, which Bach uses in the first chorus of the St. Matthew-Passion (BWV 244). While the chorus, representing the Daughters of Zion, sings,

Kommt, ihr Töchter, helft mir klagen,
Sehet—Wen?— den Bräutigam,
Seht ihn— Wie?— als wie ein Lamm!

(Come, ye daughters, share my mourning,
See ye—whom?— the bridegroom there,
See him— how?— just like a lamb!)

Bach places a cantus firmus in a separate choir of soprani, who intone the Lutheran chorale tune 'O Lamm Gottes unschuldig' (Fig. 2):

O Lamm Gottes, unschuldig
Am Stamm des Kreuzes geschlachtet...

(O Lamb of God, unspotted
Upon the cross's branch slaughtered...)

(translations by Z. Philip Ambrose)

The resulting message is that Christ, as an innocent lamb of God, will save humanity. This theme, of Christ as both God and man, as a being sent in earthly form, is explored, so argues Leahy, in the fugue of BWV 998. The fugue subject bears resemblance to two Lutheran chorales, 'Von Himmel Hoch da komm ich her' and 'Herr Jesu Christ, wah'r Mensch und Gott' - the first hymn is centered around the message of the angel who brings the

good news of Christ's birth down to Earth, while the second one has to do with the dual nature of Christ. Indeed, the case for influence from these chorales is strengthened when we consider the melodic motif of the third movement of the work, which bears resemblance to the first variation of Bach's canonic variations for organ on 'Von Himmel Hoch' (BWV 767). There is also some resemblance to the Orgelbuechlein chorale 'Christ du Lamm Gottes' (BWV 619) (Fig. 3). A religious reading of this work, while perhaps controversial, is not completely out of the realm of possibility; what composer other than Bach could have infused even the seemingly most secular instrumental work with devotional meaning?

When thinking of Austrian contributions to music history, we do not often think of much before the period of Mozart and Haydn, but in fact the seventeenth-century musical culture of the Austrian Empire was representative of a rich variety of influences from the various peoples who populated the Habsburg state. The highly-cultured Habsburg family itself counted three rather competent composers amongst them - the Holy Roman Emperors Leopold I (1658-1705), Francis Joseph I (1705-1711) and Charles VI (1711-1740) - and in general the family possessed a strong inclination toward the recruitment of fine musicians and composers from all over Europe. When the emperor Charles VI met Vivaldi in Vienna during the 1720s, for example, it was said that the usually taciturn monarch spoke with the Venetian composer more in three days than he had done in years with his ministers and advisers. Amongst the composers at the Viennese court who first exemplified the idea of the 'international' touring and performing composer who brought various national styles and influences back to Austria was the Court organist Johann Jakob Froberger. Funded by a Court scholarship, Froberger studied in Rome with the organist of St. Peter's, Frescobaldi, and then made his way to Paris and made the acquaintance of Louis XIV's court harpsichordist, Jacques Champion de Chambonnières, and the Couperin brothers; by grace of his travels, Froberger absorbed the predominant Italian and French styles of the period and combined them with his own German brand of intensity to create a musical language that was all his own. The Toccata in F (referred to generally as 'Toccata X' after Guido Adler's numbering system, but which in reality is 'Toccata IV' in Froberger's 1656 compilation of toccatas and ricercars) represents the Italian side of Froberger's training, and on first glance resembles the free-form toccatas of his master Frescobaldi. But, in contrast to his Italian models, Froberger delineates rather strongly between free-form and contrapuntal or 'metered' sections. A special trait of Froberger's musical language is his use of accented dissonances of a second (for example, between D and E-flat) or unprepared suspension chords which, when resolving, then give way only to more suspensions and clashes. As we shall hear later in the programme, the Frobergian toccata style was to have great ramifications for later music. Froberger left no significant students after him, but no less a figure than Bach was inspired by his works, as is corroborated by a letter by C.P.E. Bach in which he named Froberger as one of the composers whose works his father studied. The 'Lamentation fait sur la mort tres douloureuse de Sa Majeste Ferdinand le troisieme' (a lamentation on the death of his Imperial Majesty Ferdinand III) reflects another aspect of Froberger's artistic character, namely that of a fascination with mortality and death; after all, the composer had earlier written an allemande which he referred to as a 'meditation' on his own death, and later wrote a tribute piece to the Parisian lutenist Charles Blancrocher, who had been killed falling down a flight of stairs. The piece for Ferdinand III may also be a lamentation on the precarity of Froberger's own career following the death of his patron, for only a year earlier had he dedicated the volume of 1656 to the Holy Roman Emperor, writing in the dedication,

L'[humilis.ma](#). Diuot.me et ossequio, che io deuo a V. M.ta Ces.a per tante Clem.me gratie fattemi senza mio merito...[s]upplicando la, che si compiaccia di gradire con la sua solita Clemenza, questo riuerentissimo tributo della mia [humilis.ma](#) osseruanza; mentre augurando a V. M. Ces.a una lunga serie d'Anni colmi di prosperi e felici successi, resto Della Sac.a Ces.a et Real M.ta Vra.. Humilis.mo et oblig.mo Seruo...

'the humility, loyalty, and respect which I owe Your Imperial Majesty for so much goodness and mercy, I do not deserve...I beg Your goodwill and accustomed clemency for it, so that it may be a respectful tribute of my loyal esteem. In the meantime I wish Your Imperial Majesty many more happy years full of fortune and success and remain Your Holy and Royal Majesty[s]...loyal and obedient servant.'

Unfortunately, not only were 'many more happy years' for the monarch not to be, but on September 30 of the same year of the lamentation, Froberger was released from his position as Imperial Court Organist; the reasons are still unclear, but Walther's *Musicalisches Lexicon* (1732) later reported that the composer had 'fall[en] out of favour with the [new] Emperor.' The listener is directed to one particular aspect of the piece: at the very end, Froberger actually conjures the name of the emperor through repeating a high 'F' three times in the soprano ('fa' played three times = F x III = Ferdinand III).

The 'Aria allemanda con alcuni variazioni sopra l'Eta della Maesta Vostra' ('German Allemande with some variations on the age of Your Majesty') is a particularly charming work that has equally charming extra-musical connotations. There is little known about the life of Alessandro Poglietti, and even his national origins are in question. Apart from his name, there is nothing to suggest that he was really Italian, and his musical style is not particularly Italianate. He may very well have been a native Austrian or one of the empire's many Slavic subjects who Italianised his name for better professional recognition at a Habsburg Court so dominated by foreign musicians; he seems to have done well enough, bagging the office of Imperial Court Organist previously held by Froberger and being created a Knight of the Golden Spur by the pope. The allemande with

variations was included in a volume Poglietti presented to Leopold I and his new wife, Eleonora, upon the wedding of the Imperial couple in 1677. The politically astute composer wrote twenty variations to correspond to the age held by the bride (he may have been flattering her - in 1677, she was actually twenty-two years old), and amongst these variations are interspersed charming caricatures and vignettes of figures from the various corners of the Austrian realm. Hence, we have the 'Bohmisch Dudlsack' (Bohemian bagpipes), 'Ungarische Geigen' (Hungarian - or perhaps gypsy? - fiddles), 'Franzoesische Baiselemens' (actually, 'baiser les mains' - to kiss the hands), in a display of what seems to be a typically Germanic fascination with tongue-in-cheek musical amusements. Such a piece is not atypical of Poglietti's output - he also wrote a suite 'Upon the Rebellion in Hungary' (replete with the final trial, beheading, and a 'Requiem aeternam eis Domine') and an organ toccata 'on the siege of Phillipsburg.' The movement titled 'Alte Weiber Conduct' seems to imitate the uncertain pitches of the singing of a group of old women. An interesting parallel to this movement may be found in another set of variations on a folksong, 'Die Mayerin,' by our old friend Froberger - in the sixth variation, 'Grammaticus,' hobbling chromaticism is used as a topos to conjure images of a staid, old academic (Fig. 4). For interests of the evening's programme, the performer has opted to perform only the twelve variations having to do with the folk vignettes; the other eight variations are rather mediocre and detract from the piece enough to destroy any sense of greater architectonics. One even wonders whether they were written as afterthoughts in order to make up enough variations to match the empress' age, for they are simply of a lower quality than the other pieces. Unlike Froberger, Poglietti may have fared well under the reign of Leopold I, but his happiness was not long-lasting. During the Turkish siege of Vienna in 1683, Poglietti was killed by invading forces and his family was taken to Constantinople as slaves. Perhaps he could have taken a hint, papal knighthood and all, from a Frobergian meditation on the impermanence of existence.

As with anything by J.S. Bach, the *Concerto nach Italienischem Gusto* ('Concerto in the Italian Style,' or, literally, 'after the Italian taste') in F-Major merits a discussion that, in order to do the piece justice, would be well beyond the bounds of simple programme annotations. That being said, a few remarks on the formal and compositional influences of the piece are most helpful. Published by Bach in 1735 in Part II of the 'Clavier-Uebung' ('keyboard practise' - a modest name if there ever was one), this three-movement work essentially represents an effort by Bach to transfer an orchestral genre to the resources of a two-manual harpsichord; indeed, on the title page itself, Bach specifically refers to 'ein Clavicymbel mit zweyen Manualen.' The genesis for using the Italian concerto style came from Bach's years at the court of Duke Wilhelm Ernst of Saxe-Weimar (1708-16), where he had access to the fabulous music library of the duke's nephew, Johann Ernst, and fell in with his kinsman and distant maternal cousin, the organist and lexiconographer Johann Gottfried Walther. The young Johann Ernst, who was a rather competent violinist, keyboardist, and even composer, had just returned from university studies in the Netherlands, and had brought back with him the latest publications of concerti by such composers as Vivaldi, Torelli, Albinoni, Corelli, and others. These works made a profound impression on Bach, who had previously had as his models works that represented more archaic, seventeenth-century approaches to composition. In fact, he and Walther even made a few of the concerti of these decidedly 'modern' authors for organ and harpsichord. With respect to BWV 971, then, we may ask: what were the elements of this Italian cutting-edge, so to speak, that grabbed Bach and left its mark on his musical language? For one, there was the straightforward, balanced formal quality of Italian compositions. Sections of pieces were clearly delineated from one another through the use harmonic tension and release created by standard key relationships (for example, the relation of the tonic to its dominant, or the codification of cadences and half-cadences to create a clear sense of compositional rhetoric). Secondly, the Italians were great innovators in instrumental technique and the use of the orchestral ensemble. After all, any European violinist at the time wishing to further his training surely made his way to Italy; we saw how, in the earlier case of Froberger, the lasting impact of Italian studies on instrumental techniques in the German-speaking world. By writing in sparser contrapuntal textures than the Germans or the English, for example, Italian composers were able to give the individual members of an ensemble more room for virtuosity. Likewise, instead of writing in parts of equal significance according to traditional notions of counterpoint, they polarised top and bottom parts into true 'soprano' and 'bass' members of the ensemble, and made use of large masses of orchestral sound to contrast with soloistic sections, thus foreshadowing the development of what eventually became the modern concerto. Lastly, almost brash thematic material cultivated by Italian composers pointed to a new wave in instrumental composition that was based on idiomatic instrumental techniques rather than solely imitating the properties of vocal music.

Let us now refer to a few elements of the three movements of Bach's work in terms of how they reflect these uniquely Italianate characteristics. The first movement, the opening theme of which closely resembles the opening of an Italianate concerto grosso by the Austrian composer Georg Muffat (Fig. 5), is clearly set out in an orchestral manner, as can be seen in Bach's own notation, which delineates, as it were, the 'violoncello' register of the harpsichord from the 'bassi.' Bach distinguishes the 'soloist' from the rest of ensemble through specific indications of 'forte' and 'piano' which, presumably, indicate the use of either the coupled (loud) or upper (soft) manuals; in the first solo, for example, the accompaniment to the melody is played on the upper manual, thus putting the solo part into relief. At times, Bach even seems to indicate interplay between the soloist and another member of the ensemble (Fig. 6). The second movement is a paragon of the cantabile slow movement so perfected by Vivaldi and his contemporaries; here, Bach transforms a sparse 'Ur-melody' through the use of florid ornamentation which, unlike other composers of the period, he actually notates in full. Comparison may be found with the second movement of BWV 974, a keyboard transcription of an oboe concerto by Alessandro

Marcello, in which Bach does essentially the same thing (Fig. 7). The difference, however, between the Italian practise and Bach's own musical language is that Bach somehow is able to integrate the ornamentation in such a way that the components of melody and 'extra-melodic' ornamentation become so finely ground as to resist separation from one another. No less significant is the key in which Bach wrote the concerto. For comparison, let us consider BWV 971's partner piece, the 'Ouverture in the French Style' (BWV 972). The latter work is written in b-minor, a common key for French chamber music with wind instruments in particular, and incidentally also the key in which Bach wrote the earlier famous 2nd Orchestral Suite for flute and strings. In his *Regles de Composition* (1682), Charpentier described b-minor as solitary and melancholic, traits that describe well, perhaps, the uniquely refined nature of French Court culture. F-Major, on the other hand, was prescribed by Charpentier for 'fast and quick-tempered subjects'; this definition fits well with the general nature of Bach's composition. In the supposed 'Bach tuning' recently discovered by the musicologist and mathematician Bradley Lehman, the particularly pure thirds in F-Major seem to support a view of it as a bright, sunny key, well-suited to the 'Italienischem Gusto' of Bach's work.

The second half of the evening's programme commences with another work of Bach's, this time a g-minor toccata. The majority of Bach's toccatas for harpsichord were written when the composer was in the Wanderjahre of his early 20s and still very much under the influence and direct tutelage of Buxtehude, Reincken, and Georg Boehm - accordingly, these works reflect a seventeenth-century tradition in which the Italian toccata idiom was transmitted through the German accent handed down by Froberger. There is no doubt that a certain Mediterranean flashiness abounds in these works, but it is all underlined by a certain cerebral quality, as evidenced in the unbroken tradition of 'real,' rather than solely topos-driven, counterpoint, an element which is quite Northern in its character. After the introductory run that opens the piece - reminiscent of Pachelbel, who taught Bach's eldest brother Johann Christoph - there is a short declamatory or even recitative-like section in which the movement is determined by the qualities of the harmonies and their relations to one another. For comparison we may refer to the earliest directives for playing toccatas, provided by Frescobaldi in the introduction of his *Libro Io di Toccate* (1615):

la maniera di sonare con affetti cantabili e con diversità, di passi...non de[v]e questo modo di sonare stare soggetto a battuta, come ueggiamo usarsi ne i Madrigali moderni, i quali quantunque difficili si ageuolano per mezzo della battuta, portandola hor languida, hor veloce, e sostenendola etiandio in aria secondo i loro affetti, o senso delle parole.

'the manner of playing with vocal affects and differentiations of sections...is not always subject to the same metre; as with the performance of modern madrigals, whose difficulty is eased by taking the beat languidly at times, and fast at others, even by pausing with singing in accordance with the affect or sense of the words.'

The following section is written almost with reference to a concerto style - there are two subjects, soprano and bass, which eventually become the themes of the entire section; Bach alternates the themes between the two hands four times before calling in the 'tutti' (as in BWV 971) to further alternate with solo entries. Accordingly, these contrasts create a sense of great power in the sonority of the harpsichord, and draw the listener's attention to the different contrapuntal lines which make up the textures of the 'loud' and 'soft' characters in the movement. This section closes, almost abruptly, on a deceptive cadence which leads back to another recitative. This time, the movement of the declamation seems to be based on the twists and turns of a solo voice accompanied, perhaps, by an orchestra playing sparse, jarring chords that act in a push-and-pull interaction with the soloist. The closing fugue, one of the most relentlessly intense that Bach ever wrote, is pregnant with intervallic significance. The first part of the subject is based completely on leapwise motion, particularly that of the alternation of fourths and fifths, until it ends boldly on a high E-flat. Only after a pause does Bach finally resolve this instability, but then through a contrasting stepwise tug-of-war between the lower F-sharp and G. The basic shape of the subject, which Bach also uses in its inverted form (Fig. 8), then, really depends on this interval of a diminished seventh between F# and the higher E-flat. Earlier models for this kind of intervallic movement may be found in fugal subjects by Bach's elder colleague Johann Kuhnau, for example, and in works by Buxtehude; even Mozart later used this kind of theme, in its essence, for the fugue in the 'Kyrie' of his d-minor Requiem (K. 626) (Fig. 9). Reference to a compositional treatise of the basic period may be helpful in understanding the rhetorical meaning contained in such intervals. In his *Tractatus compositionis augmentatus* (c. 1660), the theorist Christoph Bernhard defines kinds of passings between notes, one of which is described as the 'saltus [jump] duriusculus,' a manner of irregular melodic movements that include the descending diminished seventh as found in our fugue subject (he further describes the diminished seventh in a harmonic role with the unforgettable description of 'impropria'). The dotted rhythm of the subject and the triplets that define its countersubject are further reflective of a dance influence, specifically that of the Italian giga, a comparison to which may be found in a fugue by Buxtehude (Fig. 10). As the intensity of the fugue builds through the constant entrances of the subject in real as well as inverted form, the triplet movement eventually takes over and leads back to a re-statement of the flourish that originally opened the entire piece. The closing of the toccata, however, seems somewhat sparse in the original notation; the performer, then, has decided to provide an ending which fits with the intense rhetorical quality that defines the rest of the work. Before one counters with the accusation that Bach's notation is sacred, let us observe that even Bach was known to have filled the simplest forms with some manner of improvised figuration, as it fit his fancy. Who is to say that the

show-off Bach of his early 20s would not have done the same? He even did it, much to the consternation of his ecclesiastical employers, in the playing of simple chorale tunes (Fig. 11). On the other hand, we may also remember the wise observation by the late Ralph Kirkpatrick that 'any attempts to show one's originality inevitably run into conflict with the originality of Bach himself.' By that token, we are all peasants.

Three organ voluntaries from the English Restoration commence the organ part of the evening's programme. The first two are rather well-known voluntaries by the 'Orpheus Britannicus,' Henry Purcell, while the third is from the hand of Purcell's master and senior colleague, the lesser-known John Blow. The Restoration period was, in general, a glorious period for English music and particularly for English organ-building. Because of Puritan opposition to the use of the organ in churches had led to the Commonwealth's destruction of most instruments in England, the reign of Charles II (r. 1660-1685) and his successors saw not only a great demand for organs but also a basic openness to new ideas in organ design. Such builders as Robert Dallam, who spent the years of the Commonwealth in France, and the German-born Father Bernard Smith (Schmidt), who had worked previously in Holland, brought Continental ideas about organ sonority to their work in building new English instruments. Likewise, because of England's growing commercial activity in the international sphere and a monarchy whose patriarch had spent his exile at the virtual cultural center of the seventeenth-century, the Versailles of Louis XIV, a great deal of foreign instrumental and vocal music became known in England and was widely imitated (and, in many cases, wonderfully improved upon). Both Purcell and Blow were members of the Chapel Royal of Charles II, and also served as organists at Westminster (Blow from 1668 to 1679 and again from 1695 to 1708, in the interim period granting the position to the wunderkind Purcell), and would have played the many services at both chapels. Most likely, given the remarkable training that was typical for the best musicians in that period, they would have improvised on hymn or verse tunes as well as themes from their own fancy, and thus we have relatively few written organ compositions remaining from either composer. What we do have, though, is remarkable, and these surviving compositions are clearly saturated with a sense of each composer's strongly virtuosic and adventurous personality. If only this could have inspired a new generation of composition to redeem England's Tudor and Jacobean musical heritage. Instead, later English musical culture in the eighteenth century went more the way of commercial activities that offered greater profits to composers who took that route, there came an ebb of the incredible creativity and innovation that had characterised the musical productions of the protected environment of the Court.

The G-Major voluntary of Purcell opens in an introverted and quietly intense manner, with progressions of dissonances and suspensions that resemble the Italian *toccate per l'elevazione* (played during the elevation of the host during a mass); such pieces were generally defined by unusual modulations, accented dissonances, and rhetorically pregnant motives that were intended to convey to the listener the sense of the awesome and mysterious. The basically Frescobaldian nature of the work soon gives way to a rather French flavour, as the soprano voice's twisted, angular rises and falls become more dominant. Contrasting with the nature of this section, which seems to be based on earlier models, the second fugal section of the work is built on a more modern motif. The second work, the composer's famous 'Voluntary for ye Double Organ' represents the epitome of the fusion of Italian and French styles with the wayward and adventurous nature of English musical art. The opening section, on the 'Chair' or *positif* (called so because the case was behind the player's chair, as in the old German *Ruckpositiv* - how this later became known as the 'Choir' in English organ terminology is uncertain, for the original spelling of the term for a group of singers is, properly, 'quire'), has eight entries of the theme, some of which overlap. When the theme enters on the Great, which is clearly intended with a louder registration, it quickly takes a turn for the virtuosic, resulting in a flurry of demisemiquavers that then give rise to a whole new piece, one in which the 'loud' and 'soft' manuals alternate in statements of the theme and various fantastical rhapsodies that show off the keyboardist's skill. In the final section of the piece, while this dialogue takes place, a new motif in leapwise motion elbows its way into the fray and eventually pushes out the original subject altogether as it closes the piece. The ornamentation of the various themes may seem excessive, but it is all notated in the original compositions. We are thus fortunate to have, from the hand of Purcell, ornaments as they may have been extemporised by players of the period; this revelation calls into question many modern notions of 'taste' in the application of ornaments. Alternatively, we may also have to admit that the absence of good taste, like the works of great composers and the pigeons' accretions that sometimes afflict them, is timeless.

Blow's d-minor voluntary is built on a chromatic motif of the descending tetrachord from D to A; such a theme is quite Italianate, and resembles the '*capricci chromatici*' of contemporary and earlier Italian models. Indeed, Blow's works were more than just influenced by the Italian school - at least two of his voluntaries quote directly from *toccatas* by Frescobaldi. A voluntary in C, for example, opens with the first eighteen bars of the *Toccatà 12a* of Frescobaldi's 1615 collection! This is not an isolated case. We shall recall, for instance, Purcell's G-Major voluntary and its harmonic character that resembles the Italian '*toccate di durezze e ligature*' chains of dissonances and suspensions in which intervallic clashes and resolutions define the basic movement of a work. That such significantly earlier composers as Frescobaldi or Tarquinio Merula still played a role in the compositional development of English music at a time when any music older than a decade was considered 'old-fashioned' reflects, perhaps, a uniquely English aesthetic strain of antiquarianism in the best sense of the word. This trend in English musical thought, which can be seen in the fact that what is generally considered the Elizabethan style lasted well into the seventeenth century when the rest of Europe was in the throes of the Baroque period, and in Purcell's *In Nomines* and fantasies written for viol consort decades after the forms had

descended into obsolescence, was mostly likely formed by the relative isolation of the island nation from the rest of the Europe. In light of the absence of an English instrument but with the opportunity afforded by an instrument built in the French Classic style, one may perform Blow's work on a registration known as the *Plein Jeu* (the 'full chorus' - in Latin-German usage also known as the *organo pleno*), which has a sonority of great weight and brilliance defined by a clarity that allows the difference voices to be heard in the backdrop of the grand mass of sound created by overlapping entries of the descending chromatic motif. Blow's works represent in many ways the swan-song of the irregular strain that so defined the unique nature of English composition. Instead, the facile formal style and the strong tonic-dominant harmonic schema took over, prompting the clergyman Arthur Bedford to observe in his polemic *The Great Abuse of Musick* (1711), 'Discords are like some sharp Sawces, which whet ye Appetite, and make the Meat relish the better...This Art hath languish'd since the Death of Dr. Blow.'

The *Fantaisie* of the Parisian organist Charles Racquet was commissioned by the Jesuit scholar Marin Mersenne for a second edition of the latter's monumental *Harmonie Universelle* (1636), a brilliantly wayward and quixotic multi-volume study of music theory, organology, and acoustics. Alas, such a work could be written only in the seventeenth century, an era in which men of faith produced brilliant scientific work and seemingly reconciled their mystical yearnings with revolutionary efforts in the realms of observation and experimentation, techniques which themselves were inherently contrary to the Aristotelian/scholastic tradition of knowledge by deduction. Unfortunately, Mersenne died before he could finish and publish the planned edition, and so Racquet's work remained in manuscript form and for more than four centuries could only be found in a singular copy amidst the pages of Mersenne's personal copy of his treatise. The work is remarkable if only because nothing else like it had ever been written in France; likewise, it does not seem to not have inspired any compositional trends thereafter. In fact, the *Fantaisie* is reminiscent more of Anglo-Dutch models, most directly the fantasies and *ricercars* of Sweelinck and the Tudor fantasies 'on a poynt' (quasi-improvisational keyboard works based on a single subject) tradition of Tallis, Byrd, and John Bull. What the work lacks, perhaps, in the contrapuntal perfection or harmonic innovations of Racquet's Northern colleagues, it abounds in an almost feverish quality created by Racquet's clever use of false cadences and the slackening or quickening of harmonic tempo in order to create tension and excitement, and his ability to make do with a fairly lackluster thematic subject. This subject (Fig. 12, which also shows the countersubject) contains within itself elements of potential fugal self-destruction, so to speak, for it concludes on a cadence after essentially rising the rhetorically pregnant interval of a fourth; by the time of the second entry of the subject, however, Racquet modifies the theme at will in order to give priority to the harmonic direction of the piece. When played on the *Grand Jeu*, a classic French organ registration defined by the powerful combination of reed stops (in particular, the 8' *Trompette* combined with the *Cromorne* and *Cornet* - the result is particularly piercing), the piece shows its best side, namely that of brilliance and panache rather than of any introspective or intellectually profound contrapuntal stirrings.

The piece, written in four basic contrapuntal voices (soprano, alto, tenor, bass) is divided into five sections:

1a: The subject is stated along with its countersubject in the four voices, and Racquet creates excitement through the compositional technique of 'stretto,' by which one voice states the theme before another voice has finished doing so.

2a: An ornamented version of the subject (Fig. 13) is featured in quavers, and is contrasted, as in the first part, with the descending or 'sighing' countersubject.

3a: The subject is augmented: in other words, it is written all in semibreves, and is stated once in each of the four voices.

4a: This section, according to contrapuntal theory, would be referred to as a '*bicinium duplici contrapuncto*,' which is basically a two-voice texture contrasting the subject with a countersubject in florid semiquavers. Even when a third voice is added, it is really only for harmonic interest rather than providing a true harmonic partner to either of the main voices.

5a: Essentially a coda or a 'finale,' this section features florid ornamentation and diminution in three voices above a pedal-point, a sustained tone in the bass which gives the sense of pulling the harmony back to the 'root' or basic tonality of G.

Little survives from Racquet's compositional hand, but he seems to have been regarded highly enough by his contemporaries; after all, he was appointed organist at the cathedral of Notre Dame de Paris at the age of twenty-one. Mersenne described him as 'le sieur Racquet Organiste de nostre Dame de Paris, lequel on tient pour l'un des meilleurs Contra-punctistes de ce temps' ('Mr. Racquet the organist of Notre Dame of Paris, who is considered one of the best contrapuntists of [our] time.'), and Mersenne commissioned the work expressly as 'l'exemple de ce qui se peut faire sur l'orgue' ('as an example of what could be done at the organ'). Be that as it may, perhaps it is fitting that the *Fantaisie* is so unique amongst French organ compositions. Perhaps true counterpoint, in the Northern sense of it being an exercise of the unity of the soul and the mind, was never really suited to a French artistic temperament typically concerned with keeping up appearances at the expense of intellectual discipline.

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