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PRIMARY RHETORIC AND THE STRUCTURE OF A PASSACAGLIA

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ABSTRACT

The art of the musician is much like that of the orator. Both are charged with the delivery of a sonic medium over the unfolding course of time. Furthermore, both the orator and musician must be attentive to disposition of their audience if they are to communicate effectively. Since the genesis of the discipline of rhetoric in Sicily in 5th Century BC, the musician has been invoked as a model for the rhetorician. Over time, musical theorists and composers extoled the rhetorical methods of such figures as Cicero and Quintilian, regarding them as a model for creating music. This interest in rhetoric among musicians of the German Baroque culminated in a movement known as *musica poetica*.

Simultaneous with the development of *musica poetica* was the emergence of a musical genre known as the passacaglia, which is a series of variations founded upon an ostinato in the bass. While this genre started out as an improvised folk tradition, it was quickly cultivated into a refined musical genre. Unlike many musical genres or forms, the passacaglia is not formally marked by contrasting sections such as a ritornello and episode. Rather, it is defined by the unwavering presence of a single melodic idea in a single key. As such, this genre holds the dangerous possibility of monotony. However, I argue that a skilled composer, equipped with a keen sense of proportion and the tools of oratory rhetoric, can produce a highly engaging composition in this genre.

In applying the principles of rhetoric to music, it is important to distinguish between primary rhetoric, which concerns itself with the structure of a persuasive discourse, and secondary rhetoric, which is oriented toward small-

scale poetic gestures or figures of speech. I argue that a fruitful application of rhetorical principles to music should be focused on primary rhetoric and that subsequent considerations of secondary rhetoric are of interest only insofar as they contribute to the broader narrative of primary rhetoric. Bach's Passacaglia in C Minor, BWV 582, serves as an apt exemplar for musico-rhetorical analysis. In this document, I propose an analysis that divides the work into separate, composite sections that correspond to Quintilian's five-part structure for an oration.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

"Heraclitus, then, says that all things subsist in a yielding condition, and that nothing abides; and assimilating things to the flowing of a river, he say, that you cannot merge yourself twice in the same stream."[1]
-Plato, *The Cratylus*, 4th Century BC

While certain genres and forms, such as the rondo or sonata, are characterized by the establishment, departure, and return of specific themes and tonalities, the passacaglia is characterized by a complete absence of such a sequence of events. In writing a passacaglia, the composer is faced with the substantial challenge of maintaining the interest of the listener in the midst of tonal and thematic stasis. In order to create a passacaglia that maintains the interest of its listener and has a discernible architectural shape, the composer must counteract the tonal and thematic stasis by cannily crafting other musical parameters.

At first glance, it may seem as though the passacaglia is characterized only by its limitations. However, the monothematic nature of the passacaglia allows an opportunity for prolonged thematic development that cannot easily be achieved in other musical forms. While other genres derive their interest from thematic and tonal contrasts, the passacaglia creates interest through a subtle, perpetual, and kaleidoscopic shift in musical parameters such as rhythm, texture, timbre, and dynamics while a single, persistent ostinato continues inexorably as time unfolds. Heraclitus' analogy of the river, cited above in the words of Plato, is apropos of

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[1] Plato, *The Cratylus, Phædo, Parmenides and Timæus of Plato*, trans. Thomas Taylor,

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the passacaglia. In the same way that a river follows a fixed and charted course, a passacaglia adheres to a fixed melodic idea—and, in most cases, a fixed tonality—for the entirety of its duration. However, like Heraclitus' river, the passacaglia is also characterized by perpetual fluctuation and relentless motion. Its very being is a paradoxical amalgam of stasis and motion.

The passacaglia can be defined as a variation set founded upon a ground bass or melodic ostinato.[2] As a general principle, works in this genre are in triple time, in a minor mode, and of a serious or austere nature.[3] However, the passacaglia was not always characterized by such gravitas. The passacaglia had its origins in seventeenth century Spanish folk tradition, where it was a vivacious, improvised ritornello or vamp, generally played in major keys. Italian composers such as Frescobaldi and Monteverdi soon adapted this improvisatory idiom and recast it in written form.[4] Shortly thereafter, the passacaglia made its way to France and Germany, and composers began to produce works of substantial length and intricacy.

The passacaglia's metamorphosis from an improvisatory folk idiom to a sophisticated art form in the seventeenth century was quite fast. However, the genre's decline in the second half of the eighteenth century was equally rapid. As the characteristic gallant style of the Classical Era gained prominence, sectional

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[2] Alexander Silbiger, "Passacaglia," *Grove Music Online*, accessed June 19, 2019, https://www-oxfordmusiconline-com.ezproxy.lib.ou.edu/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000021024.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Alexander Silbiger, "On Frescobaldi's Recreation of the Ciaccona and the Passacaglia," in *The Keyboard in Baroque Europe*, ed. Christopher Hogwood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 7.

variation forms became prevalent, but continuous variations such as the passacaglia and chaconne languished. This shift did not mark end of the genre's lifespan, but rather a brief suspension. During the nineteenth century, figures such as Mendelssohn and Brahms took an active interest in the forms and genres of the Baroque Era. By the last quarter of the nineteenth century, figures such as Brahms, Rheinberger, and Reger began to produce continuous variation-based works. This trend continued into the twentieth century, and Leon Stein notes that the quantity of passacaglias produced in the twentieth century far exceeds that of the entire Baroque Era.[5]

From the early seventeenth century until the present, the passacaglia has shown itself to be remarkably adaptable. Though the basic premise of the passacaglia as a seamless set of variations upon a single ostinato has been consistent, this principle has been subject to many different manifestations over the centuries. In each period of its existence, passacaglias have embodied contemporaneous aesthetic characteristics. The historical development and evolution of the genre as a whole parallels the construction of individual representative works. In both cases, a single ostinato persists and surrounding elements are modified and varied as time unfolds.

Although the passacaglia, unlike many other musical genres, has no implicit formal demands or division into composite sections (i.e. episodes, ritornelli, exposition, etc.), I argue in this document that we can endeavor to understand the architecture of a given passacaglia by means of a rhetorical

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[5] Leon Stein, "The Passacaglia in the Twentieth Century," *Music & Letters* 40, no. 2 (April 1959): 150.

metaphor. I will present a history of the passacaglia as a genre, as well as a history

of the rhetoric and its symbiotic relationship with the music. Finally, I will use

Bach's Passacaglia in C Minor as an exemplar.

Purpose and Methodology of the Study

This study endeavors to give an account of the means that composers used to create a discernible sense of shape. In this context, shape is not created by the departure and return of particular tonalities or themes. Rather, it is created through treatment of such musical parameters as rhythm, texture, range, and dynamics. This study will offer a formal analysis and musicological account of three passacaglias by three different composers.

Chapter 2 will explore the broad development of the passacaglia as a genre, beginning with its improvisatory origins in the Spanish folk tradition and continuing through the present age. This part of the study will also explore the influence of oratory rhetoric on the music of the Baroque Era in general, and on the passacaglia genre in particular. The structural formulae for classical orations will serve as a tool for analyzing large form in continuous variation works, using J.S. Bach's colossal Passacaglia in C minor, BWV 582 as a case study.

Need for the Study

The demand for this study is threefold. The first justification for this study stems from the need to provide an historical account of the evolution of the passacaglia. The second comes from a need to account for the aesthetic shifts between the cultivation of the Passacaglia in the Baroque and its revival in the late nineteenth century. The third—and perhaps most pressing—reason for this study stems from the need to provide a formal explanation of a genre that is not inherently defined by form.

Though a good deal has been written about the passacaglia as it developed in the Baroque, very little has been done to connect individual passacaglias into the broader cultural fabric in which they were composed. Some texts consider the broad history of the passacaglia from a purely technical standpoint, and others provide anecdotal information about a specific, individual passacaglia or its composer. Because the passacaglia genre is not as prominent as the symphony, sonata, or lied, it has attracted less scholarly attention by comparison. Furthermore, most of the literature written on the post-Baroque passacaglia focuses on individual works rather than on the genre as a whole.

While some hallmark Baroque genres—such as the fugue—continued to be produced occasionally following the death of J.S. Bach, the passacaglia vanished for a century following the Baroque. During this time, the societal function of music inevitably shifted, and there developed a keen tension between tradition and progress, as well as one between influence and originality. The passacaglia as a genre bears a strong connotation of musical traditionalism, and nineteenth century works in this idiom frequently invoke their Baroque predecessors. As such, this document will seek to explore the ways in which the adaptation of the passacaglia into a different historical context effected its associations and function.

Finally, this study is warranted by the fact that the passacaglia is not defined by a macrocosmic form. While genres such as the sonata are characterized by a prescribed interchange of thematic material and tonal centers, the passacaglia is characterized by its perpetual adherence to a fixed ostinato and,

in most cases, a fixed tonal center. Because the passacaglia developed when rhetoric was a prominent academic discipline, it is fitting to use rhetoric as a lens to understand the broad structure of a passacaglia. Authors such as Mark Evan Bonds have detailed the influence of rhetoric on the sonata, and figures such as George Butler and Daniel Harrison have done the same with the fugue. However, no author has attempted to apply these developments to the passacaglia. Because the passacaglia has no prescribed tonal and thematic schemata, it would benefit greatly from an application of rhetorical principles as a tool for formal analysis.

Finally, this approach has practical implications for performers. Passacaglias present massive interpretive challenges to the performer on account of their length, complexity, frequent technical difficulty, and monothematic scheme. There is a substantial threat of monotony or boredom on behalf of the performer and audience alike. The classical structure of an oration—often posed in a six-part format—allows the performer and interpreter a means to divide the passacaglia into composite parts, each fulfilling a specific function in the whole discourse. If the interpreter can internalize and subsequently communicate an understanding of the relationship between composite parts, they are more likely to keep the stimulated interest of the audience in a manner that an ancient Greek or Roman orator was supposed to.

Having discussed the benefits that a rhetorical interpretation of the passacaglia can have for the performer, let us turn our attention to the assets that this method can provide for the teacher. Engaging with a passacaglia presents a substantial challenge to even the most seasoned of students. As such, the teacher

must enable the student to internalize and understand a work that is both monumental in scope and lacking in structural modulation schemes or thematic shifts. While the metaphor of rhetoric is but one of many tools for understanding the shape of a passacaglia, it is particularly effective. An oration, like a piece of music, was both written and performed, and communicated orally over a given span of time. The teacher who can impart to students a narrative understanding of the passacaglia's structure will give them the tools with which to render a convincing performance.

Limitations of the Study

When writing on the genre of the passacaglia, it is a common temptation to discuss its relationship to the closely related chaconne. Baroque composers often employed the terms "chaconne" and "passacaglia" interchangeably,[6] and modern attempts at delineation have not resulted in an explanation that is satisfying or precise. Though the differentiation between the chaconne and passacaglia is a topic that demands further probing, it is beyond the scope of this study to do so. It must be noted, however, that works bearing the title "chaconne" will be mentioned in this study, provided they exhibit the characteristic features of a passacaglia.

Another limitation of this study applies to the manner in which the musico-rhetorical metaphor will be applied. This discussion of rhetoric will focus primarily on considerations of large-scale form and shape rather than on minute musical figures or gestures. Individual, granular musical *figurae* will be considered only insofar as they contribute to an architectural understanding of the work under examination.

Finally, this document will only survey sources written in English, or available in English translations.

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[6] Darrell Dale Handel, "The Contemporary Passacaglia" (PhD diss., University of Rochester, Eastman School of Music, 1969), 9.

Related Literature

In researching the development and evolution of a given genre, it is first necessary to understand it historically, beginning at the earliest point possible. Thomas Walker offers a glimpse into the passacaglia's genesis in a 1968 article entitled "Ciaccona and Passacaglia: Remarks on Their Origin and Early History." Walker's work accounts for the beginnings of the two genres as improvisatory Spanish folk traditions.[7] The next phase of the passacaglia's history has been documented in detail by Alexander Silbiger. In an article entitled "On Frescobaldi's Recreation of the Ciaccona and the Passacaglia," Silbiger provides a narrative of the process by which the passacaglia transitioned from an oral folk tradition to a written form of high art.[8] In another article, Silbiger accounts for the subsequent adaptation of the genre by French and German composers.[9]

Though the works of authors such as Walker and Silbiger offer vivid detail around the birth and early development of the genre, the scope of their scholarship is limited to a specific timeframe. A dissertation by Darrell D. Handel entitled "The Contemporary Passacaglia" provides a thorough comprehensive history.[10] Though this work's title indicates its primary focus on the passacaglias of the twentieth century, the author provides a thorough history of the genre's development based on primary source material from various eras. Handel's work

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[7] Thomas Walker, "Ciaccona and Passacaglia: Remarks on Their Origin and Early History," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 21, no. 3 (October 1968): 300-20.
[8] Silbiger, "On Frescobaldi's Recreation of the Ciaccona and the Passacaglia."
[9] Alexander Silbiger, "Passacaglia and Ciaccona: Genre Pairing and Ambiguity from Frescobaldi to Couperin," *Journal of Seventeenth-Century Music* 2, no. 1 (1996), http://www.sscm-jscm.org/v2/no1/silbiger.html.
[10] Handel, "The Contemporary Passacaglia."

compares and contrasts definitions of the passacaglia both from Baroque authors

such as Johann Gottfried Walther, Johann Mattheson and Heinrich Koch, as well

as from Romantic figures such as Hugo Riemann and Vincent d'Indy.[11] Though

Handel's historical overview of the genre is unquestionably an asset to this study,

his work is particularly germane on account of the many tools offered for

analyzing continuous variation works. More specifically, Handel examines the

ways in which the interaction of various musical parameters affects the

macrocosmic form of the work. I intend to adapt Handel's analytical tools and

apply them to a rhetorical hermeneutic of analysis.

In researching the development and later resurgence of the passacaglia as

a genre, it is crucial to account for musical historicism as a movement. Carl

Dahlhaus' treatment of historicism in *Nineteenth Century Music* provides a sound

philosophical framework for the movement as a whole. Dahlhaus proffers an

aesthetic theory that depicts musical historicism not as a retrogressive nostalgia,

but as a stimulus for new creation:

> "Musical historicism, whether of the nineteenth or the twentieth
> century, has always been a paradox. Any attempt to reach
> historical understanding of the evolutionary stage it had attained in
> the nineteenth century, rather than treating it simply as the
> prehistory of our own time, will have to do more than trace the
> slow growth of historical thought and performance from their
> rudimentary beginnings: it will also have to do justice to the
> resistance that historicism encountered."[12]

Dahlhaus rightly framed musical historicism as a paradox and the

paradoxical nature of this movement only becomes more apparent when studying

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[11] Ibid, 2, 40.

[12] Carl Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, trans. J. Bradford Robinson (Berkeley:
University of California Press, 1989), 320.

figures such as Brahms and Reger, both of whom are remembered as individuals that esteemed tradition on the one hand, and progress on the other.[13] In an article entitled "Brahms and the Historical Sublime," Michael Vaillancourt treats musical historicism within the framework of a broader preservationist movement in nineteenth century German culture.[14] Peter Burkholder accounts for Brahms as a musical conservator within this movement in an article entitled "Brahms and Twentieth Century Classical Music."[15] Here, he notes the influence of composers such as Eccard, Schütz, and Palestrina upon the creative output of Brahms.[16] The influence of earlier composers on Brahms is not merely a result of stylistic imitation, but an incorporation of carefully researched aesthetic principles. In an article entitled "The Musical Rhetoric of the Baroque on the Example of Johannes Brahms' Psalm XIII Op. 27," Miłosz Bazelak gives an account of Brahms as an early music scholar and specialist who devoted substantial study to treatises by Baroque theorists such as Johann Gottfried Walther, Johann Philipp Kirnberger, Johann Joseph Fux, and Johann Mattheson.[17]

  While Brahms' role as a musical historian and cultural preservationist elicited mixed reactions from his contemporaries, Reger's emulation of past

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[13] Nicole Grimes, "The Schoenberg/Brahms Critical Tradition Reconsidered," *Music Analysis* 31, no. 2 (July 2012): 127.

[14] Michael Vaillancourt, "Brahms and the Historical Sublime," *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* 46, no. 1 (June 2015): 73-94.

[15] J. Peter Burkholder, "Brahms and Twentieth-Century Classical Music," *19th-Century Music* 8, no. 1 (July 1984): 75-83.

[16] Ibid., 78.

[17] Miłosz Bazelak, "The Musical Rhetoric of the Baroque on the Example of Johannes Brahms' Psalm XIII Op. 27," *Kwartalnik Młodych Muzykológow UJ* Vol. 38, no 4 (2018): 41–45.

composers elicited downright ostracism.[18] Antonius Bittmann offers an extensive

and comprehensive treatment of Reger's historicist leanings in a dissertation

entitled "Negotiating Past and Present: Max Reger and Fin-de-Siècle

Modernisms."[19] The author gives a detailed account of the oft-maligned influence

of Bach and Brahms upon the music of Reger. Additionally, Bittmann discusses

contemporary influences of the *fin-de-siècle* ethos that shaped modernist elements

in Reger's music.

Walter Frisch treats the dichotomous relationship between historicism and

modernism in the music of Reger.[20] His article, "Reger's Bach and Historicist

Modernism," focuses heavily on the nineteenth-century reception and

understanding of the music of J.S. Bach, using Reger's Organ Suite No. 1, Op. 16

as a case study. While the revival of continuous variation forms is not the focus of

his article *per se*, it provides an illuminating description of the way in which

specific variation-based works of the Baroque influenced the compositional

processes of both Reger and Brahms.

The present study seeks to establish an historical framework of the

evolution and development of the passacaglia genre, and the nineteenth century

movement of musical historicism is a crucial component. However, this study

also seeks to understand the means composers used to create a sense of

architectonic shape when composing passacaglias. Because the genre developed

in an era when rhetoric was a salient influence on music, it is crucial to examine

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[18] Antonius Bittmann, "Negotiating Past and Present: Max Reger and Fin-De-Siècle Modernisms" (PhD diss., University of Rochester, Eastman School of Music, 2001), 36.
[19] Ibid..
[20] Walter Frisch, "Reger's Bach and Historicist Modernism," *19th-Century Music* 25, no. 2-3 (November 2001): 303.

the discipline of rhetoric both as an end in itself and as a stimulus for musical composition.

I will rely on more recent studies of musical rhetoric by Patrick McCreless, Claude Palisca, George Buelow, Blake Wilson, and Peter Hoyt to inform my readings of primary source material from the Baroque. McCreless' "Music and Rhetoric" serves as a suitable point of departure, as it presents a broad historical overview of rhetoric as a discipline, beginning with its ancient roots, and ending at the dawn of the nineteenth century. McCreless presents rhetoric as the "original metalanguage of discourse in the West."[21] He argues that it is particularly well-disposed for musical application on the grounds that oration, like music, is a structured unfolding of sound in time. He further argues that rhetoric and music alike require a carefully planned composition and a convincing, well-executed delivery or performance.[22]

Palisca surveys the relationship between music and rhetoric in a focused manner. His writing traces the application of rhetoric to music from the time of Guido of Arezzo through the Baroque.[23] In contrast to McCreless, Palisca's discourse places a greater deal of emphasis on the codification *Figurenlehre* by German Baroque theorists such as Burmeister and Bernhard, showing a brief, encyclopedic treatment of individual figures and their definitions.

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[21] Patrick McCreless, "Music and Rhetoric," in *The Cambridge History of Western Music Theory*, ed. Thomas Christensen (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 847–79, at 847.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Claude V. Palisca, "Music and Rhetoric," in *Music and Ideas in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, ed. Thomas J. Mathiesen (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 203–31.

Palisca's entry in Grove Music Online presents an overview of the relationship between the two disciplines in a manner that recalls the writings of McCreless and Palisca. This entry is organized into three parts. It begins with an overview by Blake Wilson of the relationship between rhetoric and music throughout the Medieval and Renaissance. This is followed by George Buelow's account of music and rhetoric in the Baroque. This section is particularly germane to the present study, as it describes the manner in which structural paradigms of oration were applied to the process of musical composition. The concluding section of the entry, entitled "Musical figures," details the small-scale harmonic and melodic musical figures codified by German Baroque theorists, and it is of secondary importance for the purposes of this study.

Though musical rhetoric is but one composite part of the present study, there is no shortage of primary source material on the topic ranging from the fourth century BC through the eighteenth century. Aristotle's *Rhetorica* is cited frequently, as it is the earliest surviving document on rhetoric.[24] However, as far as ancient sources are concerned, it seems that Cicero's *De Oratore* and Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria* have had a more direct influence on composers and theorists. Both of these works had a profound impact on such Renaissance and Baroque musical figures ranging from Zarlino to Mattheson.[25]

Mattheson's *Der vollkommene Capellmeister* dates from the year 1739, and it is a practical and didactic work oriented toward the training of a municipal

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[24] McCreless, "Music and Rhetoric," 849.

[25] Blake Wilson, George J. Buelow, and Peter A. Hoyt, "Rhetoric and music," *Grove Music Online,* accessed May 17, 2019, https://www-oxfordmusiconline-com.ezproxy.lib.ou.edu/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000043166.

or ecclesiastical musician.[26] It is particularly beneficial to this study because, in addition to treating issues like melodic composition, Mattheson offers a thorough treatment of musical rhetoric. *Der volkommene Capellmeister* is set apart many rhetorically oriented Baroque treatises in that it does not merely present a glossary of minute *figurae*. Rather, Mattheson's document recounts the classical models for composing and structuring an oration and applies it to musical composition.[27] This provides the modern reader with an insight as to how principles of rhetoric informed Baroque composers' understanding of form.

While *Der volkommene Capellmeister* offers the most comprehensive treatment of rhetoric among Baroque treatises, numerous other important works can be found in Dietrich Bartel's *Musica Poetica*. This book provides translations of treatises by Joachim Burmeister, Athanasius Kircher, Johann Mattheson, Johann Gottfried Walther, Johann Adolf Scheibe, and Johann Nikolaus Forkel. Each translation is preceded by an informative preface, and Bartel's introductory writings provide a great deal of context. Nevertheless, much of the primary source material in this document offers no more than scant hints at how considerations of rhetoric took effect on form. The majority of the texts deal either with small musical gestures or considerations of *Affektenlehre*.

While oratory rhetoric lost prominence throughout the nineteenth century, it is worth noting that it impacted the major composers of the Classical Era.

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[26] George J. Buelow, "Mattheson, Johann," *Grove Music Online*, accessed July 9, 2019, https://www-oxfordmusiconline-com.ezproxy.lib.ou.edu/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000018097.

[27] Johann Mattheson and Ernest Charles Harriss, *Johann Mattheson's Der vollkommene Capellmeister: A Revised Translation with Critical Commentary,* ed. Ernest C. Harriss (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Research Press, 1981), 469.

Elaine Sisman discusses Beethoven's acquaintance with oratory rhetoric, pointing to the organization of the Heiligenstadt Testament as a model.[28] Both Sisman and Mark Evan Bonds discuss the influence of rhetoric on the development of prevalent forms of the Classical Era, focusing primarily on sonata form.[29] Both authors emphasize that Haydn and Beethoven had read and studied Johann Mattheson's *Der volkommene Capellmeister* and other similar documents.

Having reviewed some writings focusing on musical rhetoric in the Baroque and Classical Eras, let us now turn our attention to twentieth and twenty-first century writings on the topic of music and rhetoric. Brian Vickers' 1984 article entitled "Figures of Rhetoric/Figures of Music?" reexamines the Baroque *musica poetica* tradition in light of the philosophy of rhetoric in classical antiquity. This article begins with an account of Renaissance humanism and the role that the rediscovery of Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria* played in it.[30] After a brief account of the cultural milieu of the Renaissance, Vickers surveys the interaction between rhetoric and music in the Renaissance and early Baroque, and his account emphasizes the emotive or affective dimension of musical rhetoric. He proceeds to detail attempts by Baroque theorists to translate codified literary figures into their musical equivalents. For example, in the literary realm, the term *noema* denoted a technique wherein a section of text is isolated for dramatic

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[28] Elaine R Sisman, "Pathos and the Pathétique: Rhetorical Stance in Beethoven's C-Minor Sonata, Op. 13," *Beethoven Forum* 3, no. 1 (January 1994): 81.
[29] Mark Evan Bonds, *Wordless Rhetoric: Musical Form and the Metaphor of the Oration*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991.
[30] Brian Vickers, "Figures of Rhetoric/Figures of Music?" *Rhetorica: A Journal of the History of Rhetoric* 2, no. 1 (May 1984): 3.

effect. Vickers cites Josquin des Prez's homophonic setting of "et incarnatus est" from a polyphonic credo as a musical embodiment of *noema*.[31]

Vickers cautions his reader against some pitfalls that arise when attempting to transfer the titles of literary rhetorical gestures to analogous musical gestures. Firstly, he warns that the categorical distinction between literature and music often prohibits the effective transferal of a title of a literary gesture to a musical gesture, or *vice versa*. At the very least, he warns that such an endeavor is likely to result in confusion.[32] Secondly, Vickers laments the fact that, among the different authors affiliated with the *musica poetica* movement, it is not uncommon that a single gesture has been given several different (and often contradictory) names.[33] As a result, such labels eventually become arbitrary and vacuous.

Vickers' article highlights certain limitations of the figure-oriented approach to rhetoric and music, but it is Daniel Harrison who offers a palatable alternative. Harrison's article "Rhetoric and Fugue: An Analytical Application" is a rebuttal to George Butler's similarly titled article, "Fugue and Rhetoric."[34] While the details of this scholarly debate will be presented in a later chapter, let it now suffice to say that Harrison, like Vickers, sought to rescue the musical application of rhetoric from becoming an arbitrary exercise in labeling figures. Harrison does this by invoking a distinction made by a twentieth century scholar of rhetoric named George Kennedy. Kennedy distinguishes between "primary

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[31] Ibid., 26.
[32] Ibid., 23.
[33] Ibid., 24.
[34] Daniel Harrison, "Rhetoric and Fugue: An Analytical Application," *Music Theory Spectrum* 12, no. 1 (April 1990): 1.

rhetoric," which emphasizes the form and structure of an argument, and "secondary rhetoric," which focuses on minute figures and tropes.[35]

Harrison argues that rhetoric is a persuasive art. As such, he argues that any analysis that gets too mired in figural minutia is in danger of missing the broad structure of argumentation. Therefore, Harrison devises a hermeneutic for fugal analysis that emphasizes the overall architecture of the fugue rather than accounting only for local events. He achieves this through the analysis of J.S. Bach's fugue from Toccata S. 19, using the classical, six-part structural model for orations.[36] It is my aim, throughout the course of this document, to employ Harrison's approach to fugal analysis as a means of analyzing passacaglias that were either written or influenced by J.S. Bach.

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[35] Ibid., 3.
[36] Ibid., 6.

CHAPTER 2

The History and Evolution of the Passacaglia

Introduction

This chapter will discuss the passacaglia's origins and definitions, and it will present a sampling of passacaglias from the Baroque Era through the twentieth century. The definitive characteristic of a passacaglia is the unwavering presence of an ostinato—generally positioned in the bass—that continues inexorably amid shifts on the musical surface. Despite the perpetuity of a single melodic idea in a single key, a skilled composer can avoid monotony in a passacaglia by creating interest through other musical parameters. Throughout the four centuries of its existence, the constructive principle of the passacaglia as a series of variations over an unwavering ostinato has remained consistent. Nevertheless, this principle of construction has shown itself to be highly adaptable, such that several passacaglias have been produced in a variety of historical periods and aesthetic trappings.

Origins of the Passacaglia

In the twenty-first century, the average listener might expect to hear the passacaglia in the rarified setting of a concert hall. However, such a listener may be surprised to learn that the genre had its origins in a festive Spanish street tradition. The earliest known appearance of the word "passacaglia"—or "pasacalle," as it appeared in its original form—stems from a 1605 novel entitled

Picara Justina.[37] The word is a fusion of "pasar," meaning "to walk," and "calle," meaning "street."[38] Because this musical idiom was intended as walking music for use in streets, it is no surprise that the guitar was the instrument of choice. Furthermore, because the early *pasacalle* was largely improvisatory and was an orally transmitted tradition, there is no substantive body of written music from this period.

Although written documentation on the early passacaglia in Spain is sparse, modern readers can learn a great deal from documents addressed to Italian audiences. A Spaniard named Luis de Briçeno published a document entitled *Metodo mui facilissimo para aprender a tañer la guitarra a lo español*. In this publication, he depicts the passacaglia as an improvisatory vamp intended to provide walking music for musicians during interludes as they make their way from one place to another.[39] In fact, the word "passacaglia," as it was used in the first quarter of the seventeenth century, was synonymous with the word "ritornello."[40]

While Briçeno provides an illuminating account of the function of the early passacaglia, texts from Girolamo Montesardo render an account of the musical character of these works. Montesardo's *Nuova inventione d'intavolatura, per sonare li balletti sopra la chitarra sangiuola, senza numeri, e note* caters to an

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[37] Thomas Walker, "Ciaccona and Passacaglia: Remarks on Their Origin and Early History," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 21, no. 3 (October 1968): 305. Also see Robert U. Nelson, *The Technique of Variation: A Study of the Instrumental Variation Form from Antonio De Cabezón to Max Reger* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1949).
[38] Ibid.
[39] Ibid., 308.
[40] Ibid., 310.

Italian populace that was interested in the five-string Spanish guitar.[41] He created—or at the very least adapted—a system of tablature that was simple enough for a broad populace to learn. In addition to a series of strumming patterns, he provided a harmonic pattern in each key. The harmonic structure of the passacaglia, as it notated in Montesardo's document, features a four-measure-long presentation of the progression I-IV-V-I in a triple meter. While the rhythmic or metric placement of harmonic shifts varies, both the four-measure length of the ostinato and the paradigmatic harmonic content of the progression remain constant.[42] In this phase of its development, the passacaglia was defined by a prescribed harmonic progression rather than by the melodic ostinato that would later characterize works in the genre.[43]

Throughout the first half of the seventeenth century, Italian composers took active interest in the oral tradition of the Spanish *pasacalle* as a stimulus for written music. In 1627, Frescobaldi adapted this musical idiom to the keyboard in his *Secondo libro di toccate*.[44] The *Partite sopra passacagli* contained in this document far exceeds the length and technical intricacy of any previous works bearing the title "passacaglia." A common formula was found in the tetrachordal bass descent, often harmonized as a [i-v^6-iv^6-V] progression. This development is

[41] Ibid., 306.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid., 310.
[44] Alexander Silbiger, "Passacaglia and Ciaccona: Genre Pairing and Ambiguity from Frescobaldi to Couperin," *Journal of Seventeenth-Century Music* 2, no. 1 (1996), http://www.sscm-jscm.org/v2/no1/silbiger.html, 5.1.

significant, as Frescobaldi is credited with being the "first composer to treat the *passacaglia* as an ostinato form."[45]

Frescobaldi made further developments to the passacaglia in the composition of his *Cento partite sopra passacagli* in 1637. His vast output of passacaglias served to define the characteristics of the genre. The passacaglia, as cultivated by Frescobaldi, is characterized by ostinato cycles of equal length—generally four or eight measures—seamlessly linked together, articulated by an authentic cadence at the end of each variation. This dovetailing or linking of variations resulted in "an almost irresistible momentum that can sustain such pieces over seemingly endless successions of cycles."[46] Frescobaldi's output of passacaglias not only defined the conventions of the genre for future composers, but also served to recast what had been an improvisatory folk genre as a written form of high art.[47]

Following Frescobaldi, Italian composers such as Cazzati, Rossi, Presenti, and Sances published passacaglias that maintained the harmonic paradigm of the tetrachordal descent over a theme in the bass.[48] Though the passacaglia lost momentum in Italy in the latter part of the seventeenth century, the genre migrated northward to England, France and Germany. The distinctive mark of the passacaglia on French soil came from its incorporation in operatic works, such as Lully's *Armide*.[49] In staged works, the passacaglia often served an extra-musical

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[45] Walker, "Ciaccona and Passacaglia," 318.
[46] Silbiger, "Passacaglia and Ciaccona," 6.1.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Walker, "Ciaccona and Passacaglia," 218.
[49] Silbiger, "Passacaglia and Ciaccona," 9.2.

function. Judith Schwartz notes that, in the context of Lully's *Armide*, the

passacaglia is invoked as an expressive device:

> In scene 2, the passacaille and subsequent chorus in similar
> movement function as a divertissement for Renaud, arranged by
> Armide to buy herself time for reflection. The chorus's text argues
> in favour of succumbing to the senses and of living for the
> moment, without thought of the consequences. To evoke
> voluptuousness and inhibit the sense of time passing, Lully's
> choice of the passacaille seems ideal, its ostinato variations gracing
> in endless variety the inevitable sameness in a form tethered to the
> ground bass.[50]

Although the passacaglia found great prominence in staged works in

France, it also flourished as an independent genre for keyboard instruments.

Nevertheless, many French keyboard passacaglias of this era were heavily

influenced by opera. For example, François Couperin's monumental Passacaille

in B Minor, while not connected to any dramatic plot, bears many characteristics

of an operatic composition of its era. It is cast in a rondeau form and has

mercurial fluctuations in tempo and texture. Furthermore, it reflects "the

characteristic moods, voicings, rhythmic figures, and tempi of the French

overture."[51]

The dramatic usage of the passacaglia also gained traction in England.

Stephen Schölau comments extensively on the ways in which the passacaglia

from Lully's *Armide* influenced Henry Purcell in the composition of such works

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[50] J. Schwartz, "The *Passacaille* in Lully's *Armide*: Phrase Structure in the Choreography and the Music," *Early Music* 26, (1998), 302.
[51] Misung Park, "Chaconnes and Passacaglias in the Keyboard Music of François Couperin (1668–1733) and Johann Caspar Ferdinand Fischer (1665–1746)" (DMA diss., The University of Texas at Austin, 2003), 25.

as *King Arthur*.[52] Both in *Armide* and *King Arthur*, the dramatic function of the passacaglia is intimately connected to the tragic plot of inevitable death, even if the protagonist's words do not reflect this reality. Both Lully and Purcell's approaches "could be explained as setting to music not the surface meaning of the words, but the deeper sense, which becomes evident when considering the dramatic context of both pieces."[53] Thus, in the case of staged works of composers such as Lully and Purcell, the passacaglia's principle of construction serves an extra-musical, dramatic function.

Although German composers such as Gluck invoked the passacaglia in staged works, the genre's development in German lands lay primarily in the realm of solo keyboard works. South German composers such as Johann Kerll and Georg Muffat brought several Italian genres to German soil, and the passacaglia was notable among them.[54] Johann Pachelbel likewise produced ostinato-based works for organ that, although entitled chaconnes reflect paradigm of perpetual tetrachordal descent, as Frescobaldi had done previously.

In North German lands, the variation-based works for keyboard instruments had long been cultivated prior to the arrival of the passacaglia. The North German Baroque School of organ composition was heavily influenced by a prominent Dutch organist of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century named Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck. Sweelinck was thoroughly steeped in the

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[52] Stephan Schönlau, "Emulating Lully? Generic Features and Personal Traits in the Passacaglia from Henry Purcell's King Arthur (1691)," *Rivista di Analisi e Teoria Musicale* 20 (January 2014), 119.
[53] Ibid., 121.
[54] Willi Apel, *The History of Keyboard Music to 1700*, trans. Hans Tischler (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972), 561-62.

variation-based writing of English virginalists, and his library contained the

Fitzwilliam Virginal Book. Sweelinck absorbed the textures and figurations of the

English Virginalist repertoire into his own style, and imparted them to such North

German students as Heinrich Scheidemann and Samuel Scheidt.[55] Therefore,

when North German organists and composers were introduced to the passacaglia,

they had a formidable arsenal of figural and textural techniques at their disposal

for variation-based writing.

In the latter half of the seventeenth century, Dietrich Buxtehude produced

two continuous variation-based works that were, at the time of their composition,

unprecedented in their length and complexity. These are the Passacaglia in D

minor, BuxWV 161 and the Chaconne in E Minor, BuxWV, 160.[56] The

Passacaglia in D minor is notably experimental in modulating through three

different tonalities. While it begins in D minor, it modulates to F Major and A

minor before returning to the home key of D minor.[57] This modulatory scheme

was largely unprecedented, nor was it echoed by Bach or any of Buxtehude's

notable immediate successors. Rather, Buxtehude's experiment with a modulatory

passacaglia remains an isolated incident in the development of the genre during

the Baroque. It is somewhat inevitable that Buxtehude's ostinato-based works

would be experimental, as he was fusing a characteristically Italian (or South

German) compositional procedure with his own North German style. Vincent P.

Benitez draws attention to the fact that Buxtehude's major North German

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[55] Ibid., 332

[56] It should be noted that, while BuxWV 160 is entitled *Ciaconna*, it bears all the requisite characteristics of a passacaglia.

[57] Understood from a Schenkarian standpoint, this tonal scheme could be interpreted as a composing out of the tonic triad.

predecessors—including Johann Adam Reinken, Jacob Praetorius, Franz Tunder, and Matthias Weckmann—did not leave behind any written ostinato-based organ works.[58]

While the aforementioned works by Buxtehude represent a significant milestone in the development of the Baroque keyboard passacaglia, Bach's Passacaglia in C minor, BWV 582 represents an apex both on account of its substantial length and intricacy. Despite its grandiosity and complexity, the Passacaglia in C minor adheres to all of the previously defined parameters of the genre: it is in triple meter, in a minor mode, and it consists of perpetual repetitions of an ostinato linked by authentic cadences. While Buxtehude's Passacaglia in D minor experimented with a modulatory scheme, Bach's Passacaglia in C minor adheres to the non-modulatory convention that had been commonplace throughout the seventeenth century. Nevertheless, Bach's work is daring in its own right not only by virtue of the permutation fugue that concludes it, but by virtue of being a colossal work that does not modulate.

To summarize thus far, the passacaglia's period of genesis, evolution, and codification is contemporaneous with the Baroque Era—a period that spans roughly the years 1600 to 1750. Over the course of a century and a half, the passacaglia developed from a brief and improvisatory episodic work to a stand-alone written work of such proportions as Bach's Passacaglia in C minor or Chaconne in D minor. It also shifted from being lighted-hearted and lively in

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[58] Vincent P. Benitez, "Buxtehude's Passacaglia Principle," *Rivista di Analisi e Teoria Musicale* 20, no. 1–2 (January 2014): 98.

affect to being characterized by austerity and gravitas. Finally, what began as a work in the folk tradition became a genre associated with the high-art tradition.

The Passacaglia's Hiatus and the Rise of Sectional Variations

With the end of the Baroque Era, the passacaglia's prominence faded. However, while the passacaglia suffered a brief hiatus through the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth centuries, the genre did not die with the end of the Baroque Era. At the very least, the passacaglia was preserved in the textbooks of the nineteenth century.[59] Furthermore, it must be noted that variation-based writing remained very prominent, albeit in a different fashion. Genres such as the passacaglia and chaconne, which are single-movement works that ceaselessly repeat a singular theme, can be defined as works employing continuous variation sets. While continuous variation writing had ceased in the latter part of eighteenth century, the closely related notion of sectional variation writing remained very prominent. Works written in the continuous variation idiom were characterized by the ceaseless repetition of a single theme as well as a dovetailing between individual variations. Sectional variations differ insofar as each variation is self-contained, frequently ending on an authentic cadence of sorts. This allowed composers a greater deal of compositional freedom, insofar as individual variations could be played at different tempi. While these works maintain the idiom of variation-based composition, they do so in a manner that drastically differs from that of the passacaglia or chaconne. The well-known opening

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[59] Leon Stein, "The Passacaglia in the Twentieth Century," *Music & Letters* 40, no. 2 (April 1959): 150.

movement of Mozart's Eleventh Sonata, K. 331, features a set of sectional

variations based on the following theme:

Figure 2.1—Mozart, Sonata 11 (K. 331), mvt. 1[60]

The theme in the representative example by Mozart could stand alone as an

independent, miniature composition. Because there are sectional breaks between

subsequent variations, the composer is allowed to liberally employ varied (and

often sudden) shifts in mode, tempo, figuration, and even meter.

Revival of the Passacaglia in the Nineteenth Century

Although sectional variations were favored throughout the late eighteenth and

early nineteenth centuries, there was a keen resurgence of continuous variation-

based writing in the last few decades of the nineteenth century. Joseph

Rheinberger composed a Passacaglia for organ, Charles Gounod composed one

for two pianos and eight hands, and Max Reger composed a greater number of

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[60] Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, *Sonata No. 11 Für Pianoforte by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart.* (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1907).

passacaglias than either Bach or Buxtehude had composed in the Baroque. Not only was the passacaglia a stimulus for many keyboard works in this period, but in 1885, it made its way into the genre of the symphony in the final movement of Brahms' Fourth Symphony in E minor.

In reviving the passacaglia in the nineteenth century, composers were not merely attempting to go "back to Bach" in terms of content and style. Rather, they fused the Baroque conventions of the passacaglia with a contemporary harmonic and textural idiom. A number of notable stylistic musical shifts happened between the mid-eighteenth and late-nineteenth centuries. One of the most significant changes lay in the treatment of dynamics. In the Baroque, dynamic markings were rather infrequent and they were generally limited to a simple *piano* or *forte*. By the middle of the nineteenth century, composers employed frequent, gradual dynamic fluctuation, as well as jarring contrasts between dynamic extremes. Furthermore, the manipulation of timbre became increasingly prominent with the development of the symphony orchestra and the mechanical and tonal innovations of individual instruments. Such innovations among individual instruments enabled musicians to employ registers and techniques that were previously unattainable. All of the aforementioned innovations and shifts in style had ramifications for each genre, and the passacaglia was no exception.

Unlike many prominent genres of the nineteenth century, the passacaglia had no interchange of themes (as in a sonata or symphony) or any accompanying narrative or program (as a in an opera or tone poem). Rather, the passacaglia was an extended, single-movement work, based on a singular repeating ostinato. As I

have stated before, this aspect of the passacaglia points to the nascent danger or possibility of boredom or monotony. In the late Baroque, Bach overcame this through the subtle manipulation of texture and figuration, as well as through his rhetorically conceived architectonic scheme. While Romantic composers certainly did well to emulate Bach's deft approach to proportion, they had other additional musical means at their disposal to assist them in their quest. The fluidity and variety of dynamics, timbre, and register allowed the Romantic composer to sustain the interest of the listener in myriad ways that were largely unavailable to the Baroque composer. While the Romantic passacaglia will be treated in greater depth in Chapter 4, let it suffice for the present to say that the musical environs of the Romantic Era provided a fertile backdrop for the composition of the passacaglia.

The Passacaglia in the Twentieth Century

It has previously been mentioned that musical style had drastically shifted during the passacaglia's hiatus in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. Nevertheless, even within a few short decades of the passacaglia's return to prominence, western classical music would undergo even more drastic shifts. In the early parts of the twentieth century, the system of functional tonality that had pervaded the preceding three centuries began to lose prominence and, in some quarters, dissolve. Up to this point in history, passacaglias had always been composed in the harmonic system of functional tonality. Nevertheless, many composers of the twentieth century were drawn to this genre, as the unwavering

presence of the theme provided an element of regularity during an era in which harmony, rhythm, and phrase lengths became increasingly irregular.

While it is beyond the scope of this document to give an extensive account of the passacaglia in the course of the twentieth century, it is worth briefly commenting on this topic. Among the many composers who have produced passacaglias in the twentieth century, Leon Stein lists Atterberg, Barber, Berg, Britten, Bloch, Bingham, De Fillipi, Diamond, Dohnanyi, Dubensky, Eppert, Jacob, Haubiel, Hindemith, Karg-Elert, Kaun, Morris, Pisk, Piston, Ravel, Read, Reger, Schuman, Scott, Sowerby, Starokadomsky, Weiner, Weiss.[61] It is remarkable to note that, in the first half of the twentieth century, the passacaglia was adapted to such divergent aesthetics as impressionism, expressionism, serialism, and neoclassicism—to name but a few. While many passacaglia for organ or other keyboard instruments have been produced throughout the course of the twentieth century, the genre has also been employed in staged works, such as Britten's *The Rape of Lucretia*, orchestral works, such as Webern's Passacaglia, Op. 1. Other notable instrumentations can be found in the example of Stravinsky's Septet, or in Hindemith's Viola Sonata, Op. 11, No. 5.

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[61] Ibid., 151.

Figure 2.2, Stravinsky, Septet, Mvt. II, Passacaglia, ms. 1-8.[62]

The diverse instrumentation of passacaglias in the twentieth century is mirrored by the diverse ways in which the genre was adapted. Although the omnipresent ostinato remained a essential characteristic of the passacaglia, composers experimented with the manner in which ostinati were both composed and presented. In the passacaglia that forms the second movement of his Septet, Stravinsky fuses tradition and experimentation. This theme, pictured above in Figure 2.1, is paradigmatically traditional insofar as it is eight measures long and cast in a triple meter, beginning with an anacrusis. Furthermore, like such Baroque works as Bach's Passacaglia in C minor, this movement begins with a monophonic presentation of the ground bass. While the presentation and content of this theme embody tradition in some ways, in other ways they are quite experimental. While Stravinsky's theme is presented monophonically at the

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[62] Igor Stravinsky, *Septet* (London: Boosey & Hawkes, 1953): 8.

outset, it is breaks from tradition insofar as it is presented as a

Klangfarbenmelodie that spans a broad spectrum of timbre and tessitura. Perhaps

an even more obvious departure from tradition stems from the fact that the theme

is not rooted in functional tonality, but in a seven-note tone row. Webern also

sought after this fusion of traditionalism and experimentalism, as can be seen in

the theme of his Passacaglia for Orchestra, Op. 1. Contrary to the previous

example by Stravinsky, Webern's opening presentation of the ostinato is

contained within a single timbre, and within a limited tessitura. Though Webern

espouses the traditional convention in the presentation of his theme, a rupture

with tradition can be seen in his choice of duple meter.

Figure 2.3—Webern Passacaglia for Orchestra, Op. 1, ms. 1-9.[63]

While passacaglias such as Webern's and Stravinsky's show a fusion of

tradition and experimentation, some passacaglias are decidedly traditional on the

one hand, or decidedly experimental on the other. Composers such as Guy Weitz

and Healey Willan tended toward traditionalism not only in their treatment of the

passacaglia but in their decision to retain a functionally tonal language, even

several decades into the twentieth century. For example, Healey Willan's

Passacaglia and Fugue No. 2 in E Minor was composed in 1958—a decade

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[63] Anton Webern, *Passacaglia, Op. 1* (Vienna: Universal Edition, 1922), 1.

characterized by total serialism. Nevertheless, the ostinato pictured below shows it to be no less tonal than Brahms or Rheinberger:

Figure 2.4—Willan, *Passacaglia and Fugue No. 2.*

While composers such as Weitz and Willan eschewed experimentalism and clung to tradition, other composers ruptured with tradition and favored experimentalism. The eighth movement of Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire,* entitled "Nacht," is subtitled a passacaglia. However, this ostinato lasts not for eight measures, but for only three consecutive notes forming the pitch class set (0,1,4).

Figure 2.5—Schoenberg, *Pierrot Lunaire*, Op. 21, No. 8, "Nacht."[64]

Earlier in this chapter, it was noted that Baroque composers summoned the passacaglia as a dramatic device. This trend was continued—or at the very least, resuscitated—in the twentieth century. Benjamin Britten made frequent use of the

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[64] Arnold Schoenberg and Albert Giraud, *Dreimal sieben Gedichte aus Albert Girauds Pierrot Lunaire: Melodramen, Op. 21* (Vienna: Universal Edition, 1914), 84.

passacaglia in such works as *The Rape of Lucretia*, *Peter Grimes*, and *The Holy Sonnets of John Donne.*[65] Like Lully and Purcell had done centuries before, Britten employs the passacaglia to signal the inevitability of death. Darrel Handel notes that Britten's treatment of the ostinato theme is extremely strict and unwavering, and musical momentum is achieved through "contrasts of texture, tone-colour, range, volume, and above all, rhythmic activity."[66]

Britten was not the only twentieth century composer to invoke the passacaglia as an expressive device. In an opera entitled *Le Grande Macabre*, György Ligeti makes prominent use of the passacaglia. As the opera's title would suggest, this opera can be characterized as a "grotesque comedy [that] plays on the fear of death."[67] In addition to the historic precedent the passacaglia as a signifier for death, Edwards argues that the passacaglia may have appealed to Ligeti on other aesthetic grounds. He argues "that the Passacaglia constitutes a further development in a continuing effort to inject process into musical material."[68]

In this brief commentary on the composition and treatment of themes of a few twentieth-century passacaglias, it has become clear that composer treated the genre in a myriad of different ways. While there are a number of conventions surrounding the definition of the passacaglia, it is worth noting that the central or definitive characteristic of a passacaglia is the perpetual presence of a singular, melodic theme. Other conventions, such as the minor mode, triple meter, and

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[65] Darrell Handel, "Britten's Use of the Passacaglia" *Tempo*, no. 94 (1970): 2.
[66] Ibid., 3.
[67] Peter Edwards, "Resisting Closure: The Passacaglia Finale from György Ligeti's *Le Grand Macabre,*" *Music Analysis* 35, no. 2 (2016): 259.
[68] Ibid., 276.

grave affect, were qualities of only secondary importance. As such, twentieth

century composers were able to maintain the essence of the genre while

modifying certain stylistic attributes.

Definitions and Theoretical Descriptions of the Passacaglia

Thus far, I have offered a brief account of the history and development of

the passacaglia from its early seventeenth-century beginnings through the middle

of the eighteenth-century. At this point, let us turn our attention to definitions that

a number of Baroque theorists have given for the passacaglia. Heinrich Christoph

Koch gives the following definition:

> The passacaglia……is not composed of sections or reprises, but of
> a melody of eight measures, which by constant repetition of its
> ground bass, along with melodic variations, results in a diversity
> from its original statement.[69]

Of the definitions examined here, Koch's is by far the most general in

scope, for he lists as criteria only the "constant repetition of [a] ground

bass" with varied accompanying figuration. However, he is very specific

about the length of eight measures. It seems that, by the time Koch was

writing, this length had become a convention. Certainly, this is echoed in

the following definition given by A.F.C. Kollmann in 1799:

> The Passacaille is written in 3/4, and begins with the third crotchet.
> Its movement is moderate and its character is serious tenderness. It
> generally consists of one section but of eight bars, to which
> variations are made.[70]

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[69] Heinrich Christoph Koch, *Musikalisches Lexicon*, translated and cited in Darrell Dale
Handel, "The Contemporary Passacaglia," (PhD diss., University of Rochester, Eastman
School of Music, 1969), 19.

[70] A.F.C. Kollmann, *Essay on Practical Composition* (London: 1799)*,* cited in Handel,
"The Contemporary Passacaglia," 18.

Kollmann's definition sets forth a series of additional criteria that seem to be definitive of the passacaglia as it had been cultivated through the late Baroque. Regarding meter, he not only notes the convention of triple time, but he specifies that the ground bass ostinato starts on an anacrusis. Furthermore, it is notable that he commented on the *affect* of the passacaglia as one of "serious tenderness." Certainly, the convention of *gravitas* that came to characterize the passacaglia in the late Baroque represents a radical shift from the raucous and buoyant character of the early Spanish *passacalle—*which were consistently cast in a major mode.

The definitions given by Koch and Kollmann are consonant with one another, and they are reflective of the characteristics of late Baroque Passacaglias. However, Mattheson's definition contradicts those of Koch and Kollmann. In comparing and contrasting the passacaglia genre to the closely related chaconne, Mattheson claims that "the passacaglia is based on no particular subject."[71] According Darrell Dale Handel, Mattheson is the only Baroque theorist to deny that the passacaglia is founded on a ground bass ostinato.[72] It is worth noting that Mattheson's *Der volkommenne Cappellmeister* was published in 1739,[73] whereas the works of Koch and Kollmann were published approximately a half-century later. Mattheson was writing in the midst of the passacaglia's development in the Baroque, whereas Koch and Kollmann were writing at a significantly later point in history. By virtue of writing about the Baroque passacaglia after the Baroque Era had effectively ceased, the latter two authors could offer a more complete, all-

[71] Ibid., 2
[72] Ibid., 20.
[73] Dietrich Bartel, *Musica Poetica: Musical-rhetorical Figures in German Baroque Music,* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 136.

encompassing view of the development of the genre—one that could be offered only with historical distance. To be sure, the earliest manifestations of the genre were, in accordance with Mattheson's observations, based more on harmonic progressions than melodic themes. However, as one can observe from the summary of the passacaglia's history thus far, the genre gradually shifted from a prescribed harmonic pattern toward a work based on a recurrent ostinato theme. The discrepancy between Mattheson's definition and those of Koch and Kollmann should not alarm a reader of the present era—for a definition given during the development of a genre will differ from one given after the genre has crystallized.

Thus far, we have examined definitions of the passacaglia over the course of the eighteenth century. Let us now turn our attention to some definitions given in the twentieth century. In discussing the adaptation of the passacaglia by twentieth century composers, Darrell Dale Handel states the following:

> The aesthetic constructive principle of the passacaglia is that of repetition, a repetition which provides continuity, coherence, order, and symmetry. In the twentieth century, these elements became the more sought after in order to compensate for the lack of that organization which was previously provided by tonality and adherence to established forms.[74]

Before briefly examining the course of the passacaglia in the first half of the twentieth century, it is fitting to consider some of the definitions assigned to the passacaglia by prominent theorists and pedagogues in the first quarter of the century. Hugo Riemann, writing in 1908, defines the passacaglia as follows:

> [It is] an old Spanish or Italian dance in vogue during the last century in France. As a movement in suites, or as an independent instrumental piece (especially for clavier or organ), the passacaglia scarcely differs from the chaconne. Like the latter, it is, for the

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[74] Handel, "The Contemporary Passacaglia," 40.

most part, in triple time, is of a stately movement, and has an ostinato; the definitions of the various ancient writers contradict one another. A model passacaglia is the one written by Bach for the organ.[75]

Riemann affirms there are some contradictory definitions surrounding the passacaglia. Nevertheless, his stipulation of the passacaglia as a work "in triple time, of a stately movement, [with] an ostinato" is consistent with the definitions given by figures such as Koch and Kollmann a little over a century earlier.

Another definition from the early twentieth century can be found in the writings of Vincent d'Indy, a prominent French composer and pedagogue based at the Schola Cantorum in Paris. In his 1909 *Cours de Composition Musicale*, d'Indy writes:

The procedure for the passacaglia is something different, for in this form the theme (ordinarily found in the bass) remains the same throughout all variations. These variations are therefore purely contrapuntal and at the same time dependent on homophony: of necessity they have a polyphonic basis, but they constitute true harmonic variations. The form of the passacaglia was one of the most widespread during the entire seventeenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth century.

Before continuing any further with d'Indy's definition of the passacaglia, there are a few elements in the above quotation that warrant commentary. D'Indy affirms the fixed nature of the theme as well as its default position in the bass register—and this is in fact consistent with the definitions of his eighteenth-century predecessors. What is of greater interest here, however, is his assertion that the variations are "purely contrapuntal." D'Indy's alliance with figures such as Alexander Guilmant and Charles Bordes in the Schola Cantorum sought to

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[75] Hugo Riemann, *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Music*, tran. E. Shedlock, revised ed. 1908 (Philadelphia: Theodor Presser: 1908), cited in Handel, "The Contemporary Passacaglia," 36.

recover a historic, contrapuntal idiom of composition that was at odds with the melody-driven, operatic idiom that was esteemed at the Paris Conservatoire.[76] By virtue of the passacaglia's primary theme or melody holding a default position in the bass register, as opposed to the soprano or tenor, the genre inevitably required a heightened contrapuntal sensibility. D'Indy's definition upholds the traditional understanding of the ostinato bass as the *sine qua non*, and this is later echoed by Leon Stein, who identifies the passacaglia as a work in which the ostinato is a "thematic unifier of form."[77]

Conclusion

This chapter has presented a chronology of the passacaglia from its roots in the folk tradition of the Spanish streets through the post-tonal adaptation of the genre by such composers as Webern and Stravinsky. While it started as an improvised street dance, it evolved into a cultivated form of high art. Furthermore, after approximately a century and a half of dormancy, the genre was not only revived, but it was recast in a contemporary style. While the passacaglia developed within the timeframe of the Baroque period, the essence of the form—the continuous presence of an unwavering ostinato theme—proved so adaptable that it transcended stylistic categories and artistic eras.

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[76] Jane Fulcher, "Vincent D'Indy's 'Drame Anti-Juif' and Its Meaning in Paris, 1920," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 2, no. 3 (1990): 295-319.
[77] Stein, "The Passacaglia in the Twentieth Century," 150.

CHAPTER 3

Primary Rhetoric and Considerations of Form in Bach's Passacaglia, BWV 582

Introduction

In the parlance of our times, "rhetoric" often connotes an emotive manner of speaking that a politician or other public figure uses to win favor with a particular group. To be sure, many politicians use emotionally heightened language and inflection in an attempt to persuade their audience of their viewpoint. While considerations of style and delivery are certainly germane to the discipline of rhetoric, they are not the substantive core of it. In its broadest definition, rhetoric can be understood as "the art of communicating by means of words."[78] However, I will seek to defend the more narrowly focused definition of rhetoric as an art of persuasion. In doing so, I will invoke a distinction made by George Kennedy, a scholar of classical rhetoric. Kennedy distinguished between primary rhetoric, which refers to the structural organization of a persuasive discourse, and secondary rhetoric, which is a literary or poetic device.[79]

The musical genre of the passacaglia developed during an era in which the discipline of oratory rhetoric had a pronounced influence on musical composers, performers, and theorists.[80] This chapter will begin with a brief history of the art

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[78] Claude V. Palisca, "Music and Rhetoric," in *Music and Ideas in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, ed. Claude V. Palisca (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 203.

[79] Daniel Harrison, "Rhetoric and Fugue: An Analytical Application," *Music Theory Spectrum* 12, no. 1 (April 1990): 3.

[80] It is important to note that, during this time, composition, performance, and theory were highly integrated musical disciplines. The *Capellmeister* of whom Johann Mattheson wrote would function simultaneously as a composer, performer, and theorist.

of rhetoric from its Ancient Greco-Roman origins through the seventeenth century. I will also give an historic account of the manner in which the principles of oratory rhetoric were adapted to music by proponents of the *musica poetica* movement of post-Reformation Germany. I will advocate for primary rhetoric (as opposed to secondary rhetoric) as a vehicle for formal analysis, invoking Harrison's analysis of Bach's Fugue from Toccata S.19 as a model. Finally, I will apply this mode of formal analysis to the genre of the passacaglia, using Bach's Passacaglia in C Minor as an exemplar.

Rhetoric from Antiquity through the Middle Ages

The discipline of rhetoric started in Sicily in 458 BC when two landowners had a dispute over property and needed to summon their powers of persuasion to settle the rift. This method of argumentation spread rapidly and, by the end of the fifth century BC, had spread to the Greek mainland and to Athens.[81] By 393 BC, when Isocrates had founded the school in Athens, there was already a debate as to whether rhetoric was an art of persuasion (apropos of Kennedy's term "primary rhetoric") or a literary art employing poetic figures of speech (after the manner of Kennedy's "secondary rhetoric.") Furthermore, figures such as Plato grew suspicious of rhetoric on the grounds that it could be used as a means of manipulation or deception. Through a famous dialogue between Gorgias and Phaedrus, he denounced rhetoric and advocated for philosophy and logic as a superior means of truth seeking.[82] On the contrary, his student, Aristotle defended

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[81] Patrick McCreless, "Music and Rhetoric," in *The Cambridge History of Western Music Theory*, ed. Thomas Christensen (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 848.
[82] Ibid., 849.

the legitimacy of rhetoric and, in 335 BC, produced the earliest surviving written treatise on rhetoric.[83]

With the dawn of the Roman Empire, the Greek tradition of rhetoric was adopted by such Roman figures as Cicero and Quintilian. Quintilian's treatise, entitled *Institutio Oratoria,* was published around 95 AD and had profound influence on later rhetoricians. McCreless hailed this work as a "summa" of classical rhetoric, acknowledging it as a comprehensive systematic treatment of the entire Greco-Roman tradition.[84] As I will later discuss, this treatise was especially influential both for Renaissance humanists as well as for proponents of *musica poetica*.

Cicero's *De Oratore* is another seminal rhetorical treatise from the Roman Empire, and much of it is devoted to the execution or delivery of an oration. The author places great emphasis on the manner in which the orator manipulates pitch and rhythm of voice to create a proper affectation for the message being delivered. As such, he likened the work of an orator to that of a musician.[85] While style is an important concern for Cicero, it is not his only concern, nor is it his chief concern. After all, a virtuosic delivery is of no avail if the underlying message is void of substance. The primacy of content over style can be seen in Cicero's oft-recited threefold aim of rhetoric: to teach (*docere*), to move (*movere*), and to delight (*delectare*).[86] This ethic of rhetoric, to my thinking, rightly orders the aims of rhetoric: the notion of *docere*, that is, teaching or

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[83] Ibid.
[84] Ibid.
[85] Palisca, "Music and Rhetoric," 207.
[86] McCreless, "Music and Rhetoric," 850.

communicating a truth, is preeminent. Secondary to that is *movere*, wherein the interlocutor is *moved* to accept or acknowledge the soundness of a claim. Finally, the notion of *delectare* is a means of making the presentation of the position pleasing without compromising or undermining its truth. In this situation, beauty of delivery is neither a flippant addendum nor a means of deception. Rather, it is at an auxiliary of the truth that is being communicated. One can see an apt analogy for this in the flying buttresses on a gothic cathedral. While these buttresses have come to be understood to be part of the aesthetic appeal of a gothic cathedral, they were not intended as ornamental devices. Rather, they are a visually pleasing architectural means of enabling the apex of an extremely tall ceiling to be supported without any internal pillars.

Although rhetoric in the Middle Ages is not the focus of this document, it is important to note that the discipline continued through this era. A comprehensive treatment of this can be found in Rita Copeland's annotated compilation of primary source material entitled, *Medieval Grammar and Rhetoric*.[87] While many of the Ancient Greco-Romans understood rhetoric to be a means of persuasion or truth seeking, the majority of rhetoricians in the Middle Ages understood rhetoric to be a literary art.[88] As such, the allegorical "figures and tropes" associated with secondary rhetoric became a central focus of the era.[89]

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[87] Rita Copeland, *Medieval Grammar and Rhetoric: Language Arts and Literary Theory, AD 300-1475*, ed. Rita Copeland and Ineke Sluiter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).
[88] Ibid., 2.
[89] Ibid., 28.

The Renaissance, Rhetoric, and Music

The humanistic fervor of the Renaissance era brought about great interest in the study of rhetoric as it was understood by the ancient Greco-Roman thinkers. As such, writings on this subject by such figures as Aristotle, Cicero and Quintilian were rediscovered and put into print.[90] Brian Vickers estimates that, between 1400 and 1700, approximately 2,000 rhetoric textbooks were composed, each selling between 250 and 1,000 copies. The 1470 publication of Quintillian's *Institutio Oratione* had a widespread impact on such literary figures as Shakespeare, Milton, and Pascal.[91] This literary interest in rhetoric came to impact fifteenth century musical figures such as Josquin des Prez and Johannes Tinctoris. The parallel between music and rhetoric was already acknowledged in Ancient Rome when Quintilian extolled the musician as a model for the evocative orator. Similarly, Cicero admonished the orator to pay fastidious attention to vocal inflection and tone in *De Oratore*, and there is reason to believe that this influenced Tinctoris' thinking on counterpoint.[92] Alexis Luko makes a convincing correlation between Tinctoris' eight rules of counterpoint from Book 3 of the *Liber de arte contrapuncti* and Cicero's four virtues of style from Book 3 of *De Oratore*.[93] In codifying a system of musical grammar that was syntactically sound and stylistically pleasing, Tinctoris may have looked toward Cicero's treatment of prose as a model. Although the correlation between musical and linguistic

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[90] McCreless, "Music and Rhetoric," 850.
[91] Brian Vickers, "Figures of Rhetoric/Figures of Music?" *Rhetorica: A Journal of the History of Rhetoric* 2, no. 1 (May 1984): 1-44, at 5.
[92] Ibid.
[93] Alexis Luko, "Tinctoris on Varietas," *Early Music History* 27 (2008), 110.

nomenclature precedes Tinctoris by a substantial amount of time, Luko's comparison shows close parallels between the two.

Although rhetoric is primarily an "art of communicating by means of words," the principles of rhetoric are easily transferred non-verbal arts as well. Patrick McCreless has spoken of rhetoric as a "metalanguage of language" that is transferrable across many different disciplines.[94] The principles of linguistic rhetoric are particularly applicable to music insofar as a musical composition or improvisation, like an oration, is a sonic phenomenon in which unfolds over time. In fact, many musical terms pertaining to the measurement of time have their origin in grammatical terminology. Musical terms such as "phrase," "cadence," "period," or "sentence" have been adapted from the linguistic discipline.[95] It is therefore no surprise that, in the humanist milieu of the Renaissance, a correlation between music and rhetoric came to the fore.

Rhetoric and the Development of the *Secunda prattica*

Though the correlation between music and rhetoric was strengthened during the Renaissance, it reached new heights during the Baroque. In fact, many of the stylistic changes that mark the beginning of the Baroque era were connected to the interrelationship between text and music. In the late sixteenth century, such figures as Giovanni di Bardi sought to develop a form of dramatic monody inspired by Ancient Greek tragedies. In doing so, they sought to set texts to music in such a manner as to mirror the natural rhythms of speech, thus developing the *recitative*. The free rhythm of the recitative spawned a new system

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[94] McCreless, "Music and Rhetoric," 852.
[95] Mark Evan Bonds, *Wordless Rhetoric: Musical Form and the Metaphor of the Oration* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 86.

of harmonic organization known as *basso continuo*. This shorthand system of notation can be understood as analogous to the twentieth century practice of jazz chords insofar as a specific harmonic pattern is prescribed while many of the minute details are left to the spontaneous imagination of the performer. Though the *basso continuo* developed from a need to furnish non-metric and rhythmically irregular music with harmonic support, it completely reshaped the manner in which a harmony was understood. While Renaissance theorists such as Tinctoris and Gioseffo Zarlino spoke primarily in terms of linear counterpoint, composers of the early Baroque favored harmony over counterpoint. This is but one facet of the ways in which the relationship between text and music informed the stylistic shifts of the Baroque.

One of the most famed written records surrounding the stylistic shift between the Renaissance and Baroque is the debate between Giulio Cesare Monteverdi—brother of the avant-garde composer, Claudio Monteverdi—and Giovanni Maria Artusi—an ardent student and devotee of Zarlino.[96] Here, Artusi indicts the harsh dissonance of Monteverdi's madrigal, *Cruda Amarilli*, as a flippant violation against a sound contrapuntal ethic of composition. Giulio Cesare Monteverdi defended the integrity of his brother's madrigal by drawing a distinction between two different legitimate practices of musical composition. On the one hand, the *prima prattica* was characterized by a firmly controlled treatment of dissonance that accords with Zarlino's doctrine. On the other hand, the *secunda prattica* allowed for accented dissonance to fulfill an expressive

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[96] Suzanne G. Cusick, "Gendering Modern Music: Thoughts on the Monteverdi-Artusi Controversy," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 46, no. 1 (1993): 2.

purpose. Giulio Cesare states that this school of composition "considers harmony to be the commanded and not [the] commanding," he analogously regards harmony as the "mistress" of the text.[97]

The proceedings of the Artusi-Monteverdi debate reveal that many of the stylistic shifts that marked the advent of the Baroque Era around the turn of the seventeenth century were driven by concerns of text. As such, the interest in classical rhetoric did not merely coincide with the burgeoning of a new musical style. Rather, it is this interest in classical rhetoric that served as a catalyst for the development of new musical techniques such as the recitative style, *basso continuo*, and the prominence of accented dissonance.

The Reformation and *Musica Poetica*

We have stated above that humanism had a profound impact on the musical trajectory of the late sixteenth century. Now, let us turn our attention to another phenomenon of the sixteenth century that impacted music, namely, the Reformation. The relationship between music and rhetoric became a topic for fierce debate and discussion following the Protestant Reformation and has remained relevant to the present day. Given that rhetoric is, in a broad definition, an art of communicating with words, it is no surprise that Martin Luther would take a keen interest in it. After all, emphasis on the spoken word and primacy of the Word of God in scripture were central components of his proposed reform. In a brief slogan, *sola scriptura*, Luther sought to uphold scripture as the sole basis of authority. With the Lutheran doctrine of *sola scriptura* came a renewed

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[97] Fausto Razzi, "Polyphony of the 'Seconda Prattica': Performance Practice in Italian Vocal Music of the Mannerist Era," *Early Music* 8, no. 3 (1980): 302.

emphasis on preaching the scriptures, which enkindled a keen interest in rhetoric among many of Luther's followers. A preacher of the Word, after all, was charged both to persuade a congregation of a given doctrine, and to stir up feelings of edification and devotion.[98] In this regard, the Ciceronian agenda of *docere*, *movere*, and *delectare* was quite applicable. The importance of linguistic rhetoric spawned an entire curriculum of education, which would later form the Lutheran *Lateinschule*. This program of classical education spread throughout the German lands, and was driven largely by Philipp Melanchthon, a follower of Luther's and an ardent classical humanist.[99]

Luther was also a lover of music and a skilled musician. Not surprisingly, music played an integral role in his reforms. He himself composed several melodies, and he was insistent on the vital importance of congregational singing, thereby giving rise to the tradition of the Lutheran chorale. He stated that music was as powerful a tool for preaching the Gospel as spoken word, and this gave way to "an entire philosophy of constructing music based on the terminology of spoken rhetoric."[100] At the time of the Protestant Reformation, the study of music could be divided into two separate categories. On the one hand, there was *musica theoretica*, which was a speculative and numerical enterprise rooted in the Boethian *quadrivium*. On the other hand, there was *musica practica*, which emphasized the applied study of musical composition and performance, as a

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[98] Dietrich Bartel, *Musica Poetica: Musical-rhetorical Figures in German Baroque Music* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 7.
[99] Ibid., 9.
[100] Joel Speerstra, *Bach and the Pedal Clavichord: An Organist's Guide,* Eastman Studies in Music 26 (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2004), 114.

linguistic art that accords with Boethius' *trivium*.[101] However, the study of music demanded by the Lutheran *Lateinschule* did not fit cleanly into either of these categories. As such, Nicolaus Listenius proposed a third category of *musica poetica* to suite this cause.[102]

Writing in 1606, Joachim Burmeister defined *musica poetica* as "that discipline of music which teaches how to compose a musical composition….in order to sway the hearts and spirits of individuals into various dispositions."[103] Here, we can see that the threefold Ciceronian ethic of rhetoric (*docere, movere, delectare*) is at the crux of this definition. A similar understanding of *musica poetica* is given by Johann Gottfried Walther, who describes the process of musical composition as "a mathematical science, in which one composes a lovely and pure ordering of the sounds, and commits them to the page so that afterwards they can be sung or played, and thereby in the first place to lead people into fervent prayer to God, and also to delight and amuse the Ear and the Mind."[104] It is clear from both of these definitions that the threefold Ciceronian ethic of rhetoric (*docere, movere, delectare*) is pervasive. *Musica poetica*, as a musical philosophy and pedagogy, fuses the persuasive and affective elements of rhetoric.

Joachim Burmeister, who can be acknowledged as the founding father of the *musica poetica* movement, was born in Lüneburg, a hotbed for the study of music and rhetoric in the sixteenth century. In 1606, he published a document entitled *Musica Poetica* in 1606 in which he "introduced a systematic concept of

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[101] McCreless, "Music and Rhetoric," 852.
[102] Bartel, "Musica Poetica," 20.
[103] Ibid., 10.
[104] Speerstra, "Bach and the Pedal Clavichord," 114.

musical-rhetorical figures" based on well-known examples in the contemporary repertoire.[105] Here, Burmeister applies the names of linguistic rhetorical figures to musical gestures. In some cases, the name applied to a musical figure had directed correspondence with the etymological roots of the term itself. In other cases, the name applied to a musical figure had an analogous correlation to a linguistic figure bearing the same name.[106] Burmeister was among the first to compile a lexicon of musical-rhetorical figures that would come to be dubbed *Figurenlehre.*[107] Later theorists, such as Johann Gottfried Walther, Johann Mattheson, Johann Adolf Scheibe, and Johann Nicolaus Forkel—who is notable as the earliest biographer of Johann Sebastian Bach—codified lists of *Figurenlehre*.[108]

Burmeister and the future proponents of the *musica poetica* movement sought a means of controlling musical affectation.[109] That said, a modern reader must bear in mind that the Baroque notion of affectation differs from the spontaneous emotional subjectivity that would later characterize the aesthetic of Romanticism. Rather, the Baroque theorists and composers associated with the *musica poetica* movement sought to cultivate a treatment of *affekt* that was objective, measured, and scientific.[110] This can be verified by Walther's definition of music (in his *Musicalisches Lexicon*) as a "heavenly-philosophically and specifically *mathematical science*, which concerns itself with tones, with the

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[105] Bartel, "Musica Poetica," 94.
[106] Ibid., 95.
[107] Ibid.
[108] Speerstra, "Bach and the Pedal Clavichord," 114.
[109] McCreless, "Music and Rhetoric," 856.
[110] Bartel, "Musica Poetica," 157.

intent to produce an agreeable and artful Harmony or consonance."[111] (Emphasis mine) Similarly, Johann Mattheson defined music as "the science and art wisely to arrange proper and agreeable sounds in a correct manner, and to execute them pleasingly."[112]

The principle of affectation was inherently understood as mathematical on the basis that certain aural phenomena (such as musical intervals) are a sonic manifestation of numerical proportions that impact the hearing subject. For example, the differentiating quality of the major vs. minor mode is the intervallic quality of the third above the final or tonic pitch. Writing a century prior to the *musica poetica* movement, Zarlino stated that sonorities with the major third above the final, "are lively and full of cheer" whereas ones featuring the minor third are "somewhat sad and languid."[113] As theorists of this era understood it, "the numerical proportions, which are at the root of all created matter and life, are the same ones which are reflected by the musical intervals. Thus music, the audible form of the numerical proportions, facilitates an aural perception of the realities which lie at the root of all natural phenomena."[114] In summary, the Baroque theorists presupposed that affection was scientifically rooted.

Musica Poetica and the Gravitation Toward Secondary Rhetoric

Musico-rhetorical figures were codified with a specific mind toward the affect they would achieve. However, the *figurae* often tended to be ornamental by nature. In fact, Johannes Susenbrotus states that the *figurae* were intended to

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[111] Ibid., 10.
[112] Ibid.
[113] Ibid., 41.
[114] Ibid., 38.

"relieve the irritation of everyday and worn-out language, to lend the oration greater delight, dignity, and elegance, to add greater force and charm to our subject and finally to fortify our writing or speaking in an unusual manner."[115] Johann Christoph Gottsched further wrote that "the *entire* power of an oration is rooted in the figures."[116] (Emphasis mine) While the *figurae* were devised as ornamental devices oriented toward arousing affectation, Gottsched's comment suggests that their role is far more substantial. If the "entire power of an oration" lies in the small ornamental figures, rather than the substance of the message being communicated, this suggests that the *figurae* are no longer an ornamental part of the oration or composition, but rather an essential or defining part.

A Case for Primary Rhetoric

This brief perusal of musical lexicons produced in the German baroque shows an extensive focus on localized *figurae*. Let us recall George Kennedy's distinction between primary rhetoric (which emphasizes the structural organization of a persuasive discourse) and secondary rhetoric (which emphasizes small literary gestures, tropes, or glosses). The vast majority of these lexicons embrace secondary rhetoric rather than primary rhetoric. However, modern critics such as Brian Vickers and Daniel Harrison have sought to reclaim rhetoric as a preeminently persuasive art.

Much of the nomenclature for the *figurenlehre* was adapted from the literary arts. While some of the musical figures merely shared a name with seemingly unrelated literary figures, other musical figures were mimetic of a

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[115] Ibid., 70.
[116] Ibid.,72.

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corresponding literary figure. Brian Vickers highlighted some potential pitfalls surrounding the application of literary figures to music, and intimated that, with the adaptation of some of the merits of oratory rhetoric, musical rhetoricians also adapted some of its flaws. His critique of literary rhetoric textbooks is distilled into two major concerns. The first of these concerns centers around the "proliferation of categories."[117] There are superabundant rhetorical labels or terms, and a student of rhetoric is in danger of being confounded with an excessive amount of "meaningless detail."[118] The second of Vickers' major concerns—one that I would posit is of greater concern—stems from ambiguity of definition. Oftentimes, one particular term is employed by multiple others in significantly different or even contradictory ways. Often, a given term is employed by multiple critics in significantly different or even contradictory ways. Vickers highlights the danger of vague or contradictory nomenclature:

> If one mechanic understands by "clutch" what another understands by "accelerator," the result can only be confusion and danger. In musical rhetoric, no one is likely to get harmed by mistaking one figure for another, but the subject will certainly become confused.[119]

Certainly, the various contradictory definitions used by different authors render it impossible to distill a unified doctrine from the many texts.

To Vickers' admonitions and concerns, I would like to add one of my own. Even the most rigorously defined musico-rhetorical figure can be used to achieve a great variety of different affects or functions. Later in this paper, I will

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[117] Vickers, "Figures of Rhetoric/Figures of Music?" 23.
[118] Ibid.
[119] Ibid., 38.

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demonstrate a number of instances in which Bach makes use of certain *figurae* (i.e. *corta*, and *suspirans*) in starkly different fashions. Furthermore, the definitions of many of these figures focus on some musical parameters while ignoring others. For example, a *figura corta*, as we shall read in the following analysis of Bach's Passacaglia in C Minor, can feature smooth, melodically conjunct, stepwise motion, or it can feature angular and disjunct motion. In short, one named figure can be used to achieve a multitude of different effects.

Up to this point, we have focused largely on the risks associated with a disproportionate emphasis on secondary rhetoric. Having identified a potential pitfall, let us seek to avoid the snare through a reorientation toward primary rhetoric. In doing so, we turn our attention to an article by Daniel Harrison entitled "Rhetoric and Fugue." His quest to recover primary rhetoric is not predicated on the demise of *figurae*, nor does he seek to disavow them entirely. Rather, he endeavors to reframe the application of rhetoric to music in such a way that analysis of small-scale figures would not eclipse the attention given to the overall construction of a work. Harrison notes that German Baroque proponents of *Musica Poëtica*—Burmeister in particular—drifted from the classical predilection for primary rhetoric toward an emphasis of secondary rhetoric. By the 17th and 18th centuries the teaching of rhetoric was "skewed toward teaching figures of speech" while "subtler aspects of rhetoric--invention, disposition, delivery, memorization-were either ignored or relegated to dialectic, which was studied after rhetoric."[120] Overall, rhetorical analysis of music has followed the same path, giving disproportionate focus to isolated musical gestures. This

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[120] Ibid., 2.

granular understanding of rhetoric was not only advocated by figures such as Burmeister in the seventeenth century but is also espoused by a number of modern critics. Harrison's *Rhetoric and Fugue* was written in response to an article by Gregory Butler, inversely named *Fugue and Rhetoric*.[121] In *Rhetoric and Fugue*, Harrison indicts Butler's rhetorical analysis of the fugal genre as "brutally atomized."[122] A proper rhetorical analysis of a fugue, he argues, must not focus exclusively on individual parts, but must account for the syntax and form of the fugue as a whole.

Harrison demonstrates his approach through an analysis of the fugue from Bach's Toccata, S. 915. He notes that, by virtue of beginning with an unaccompanied statement of a subject, fugues begin in a very vulnerable manner. The listener may be dubious of the subject upon hearing it, or, moreover, be unconvinced that the composer (or improviser) of the fugue has sufficient technical capacity to execute it successfully. In short, the beginning of a fugue is suspenseful because the opportunities for failure are abundant. If an orator's task in delivering a speech is to persuade the listener of the soundness of a particular point of view, Harrison argues that a composer's task in writing a fugue is to "persuade an audience that the musical material can make a convincing and successful composition and that the composer has sufficient technique, control, and artistry to create an interesting piece of music despite the several obstacles that the fugal form puts in the way."[123]

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[121] Gregory G. Butler, "Fugue and Rhetoric," *Journal of Music Theory* 21, no. 1 (April 1977): 49-109.
[122] Ibid., 4.
[123] Harrison, "Rhetoric and Fugue," 5.

Primary Rhetoric and the Passacaglia

Although Harrison sought to emphasize the persuasive aspect of rhetoric through the analysis of a fugue, the same principles are applicable to the genre of the passacaglia. Like the fugue, a passacaglia—at least by the definitions of the German Baroque—began with an unadorned statement of a ground bass. The potential for failure can also be perceived at the beginning of a passacaglia for a number of reasons. One challenge lies in the fact that the ground bass must be crafted in such a way that it is not only meritorious as an independent theme, but has the ability to be cast in any voice of a four-voice texture, and further be malleable to a variety of harmonizations. Once the obstacle of well-crafted ground bass has been overcome, there looms the added consideration that the theme must be sustained in an unrelenting fashion for a sustained period of time. In this manner, the margin of error is even greater than in the fugal genre, where intermittent episodes allow opportunities for the subject either to undergo motivic fragmentation or vanish altogether. Furthermore, the genre of the fugue permits extensive modulation, while the passacaglia maintains a single tonal center.

In the same way that the process of creating a passacaglia presents the composer with unique challenges, the process of understanding a passacaglia presents the analyst with some challenges. The majority of instrumental genres in the common practice period—fugues, sonatas, and Baroque dance forms to name a few—are generally analyzed with respect to the departure and return of thematic content and tonal areas. However, this system of analysis would prove to be quite ineffective in the analysis of a passacaglia—a genre that is characterized by the

unwavering presence of a single theme in a single tonal area. Therefore, analysts

seeking a structural understanding of this piece must devise an approach that takes

into account other musical parameters. In commenting on the structure of Bach's

great Passacaglia in C minor, BWV 582, Peter Williams observes that "the only

unambiguous principle of organization is the simplest: a 'dynamic of

development,' a shape formed by troughs and peaks, not a 'symmetrical

structure.'"[124] In my own analysis of Bach's Passacaglia, I will expand on

Williams' proposed "dynamic of development" and consider the ways in which

parameters such rhythm and texture govern the overarching form of the work.

Inventio and the Ostinato of Bach's Passacaglia in C Minor

It has been stated above that a successful ostinato theme must fulfill a

series of seemingly contradictory roles. It must be conducive to functioning both

in a supportive, auxiliary role as well as in a prominent, leading role. It must be

independently interesting as a melodic unit, yet not so melodically inventive as to

be ill-suited to harmonic or textural variation. In short, the composition of an

ostinato for a passacaglia requires the composer to grapple with great plethora of

contradictions. Trying as this task may be, the ground bass for Bach's Passacaglia

in C Minor represents a successful treatment of these tensions. Let us consider the

ways in which the rhythmic, melodic, and harmonic content individually

contribute to its success.

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[124] Peter Williams, *The Organ Music of J.S. Bach*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge
University Press, 2003), 187.

One of the most consistent elements of this ostinato can be found in its persistent trochaic rhythm. This approach to rhythm achieves a keen symbiosis between motion and stasis. The rhythmic pattern is consistent and seemingly stagnant throughout the whole of the theme, it is wrought with forward momentum insofar as it begins with an anacrusis. By beginning the ostinato on an anacrusis, the composer enables a subtle dovetailing between individual variations throughout the course of the piece. This dovetailing is achieved by continued figuration in the accompanying voices amid a transition between iterations of the ostinato theme.

This eight-measure ostinato can be understood as a periodic structure containing two composite four-measure phrases. The fourth full measure of this ostinato marks the halfway point, and this measure begins on the fifth scale degree. Arguably, this can be understood as an implied half-cadence. As such, the theme can be interpreted as an antecedent-consequent pair in which a half cadence is followed by an authentic cadence. In this sense, the ostinato itself is a self-contained, self-sufficient musical idea with a tension followed by a resolution.

Figure 3.1: Harmonic Implications of Ground Bass of Bach's Passacaglia

In addition to the architectural shape supplied by the harmonic implications of the theme, there is a similar contrast supplied through the melodic contour and tessitura. The tonic-to-dominant harmonic motion of this ostinato is achieved through melodic ascent. One might further argue that mm. 1-4 form an

embellished and prolonged 5-6-5 melodic upper neighbor relationship. This interpretation is supported by the fact that, following the ascent of the fifth in the beginning two notes, the melodic contour is largely conjunct.

Figure 3.2: Melodic Analysis of Ostinato
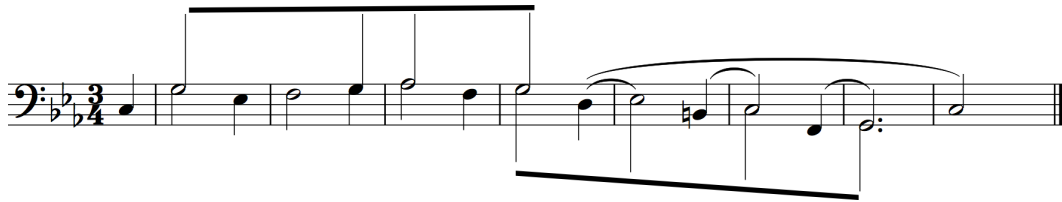
If the first four measures can be understood as a melodically conjunct means of ascending from the tonic to the dominant, then the succeeding four measures (which represent a melodically *disjunct* means of *descending* from dominant to tonic) can be understood as a diametric opposite. The idea of construction underlying the second phrase is quite simply an unfolding of the tonic triad embellished by incomplete lower neighbor tones. Although this melodic gesture is founded upon the tonic triad, it is amenable to a variety of harmonic treatments.

While a fervent biographer might be tempted to regard Bach's deftly crafted ostinato as the product of improvisatory ingenuity, the intentionality with which it was designed dispels such a romantic notion. Bach was certainly a superb improviser, gifted with exceptional spontaneous genius. However, most accounts of his remarkable aptitude for improvisation speak not of his ability to devise a theme, but rather of his ability to exploit the potential of a pre-composed theme to its optimal capacity. In order for Bach to build craft a large-scale piece, it was necessary that such an edifice be undergirded by the foundation of a stalwart theme.

The importance of a well-crafted theme was a hallmark of musical rhetoric in the Bach's time. German Baroque disciples of the *musica poetica* movement were steeped in the creative process laid out in Cicero's *De Inventione*.[125] And though Bach himself was by no means a scholar of rhetoric, his musical formation at the Lüneberg Lateinschule certainly exposed him to the musico-rhetorical doctrine of the *musica poetica* movement.[126] Christoph Berhard—one of *musica poetica's* pivotal figures—adapted Cicero's five-step procedure for preparing an oration and applied it to musical composition. In adapting this model, Berhard distilled it to the three-phase process, consisting of *inventio, elaboratio,* and *executio*. The first of such phases, *inventio* (invention), had to do with the creation of a theme or subject. However, successful *inventio* had to anticipate the demands of the next phase, *elaboratio.* In order for an exciting elaboration to occur, the theme itself must be properly disposed to such elaboration. Finally, *executio* (or execution) refers to the performance and ornamentation of the finished product.

The important matter in considering the model that Berhard adapted from Cicero has to do with the relationship between *inventio* and *elaboratio.* The process of *inventio* not only requires a composer to create a subject that is convincing on its own intrinsic merits, but also to create one that is also amenable to pleasing *elaboratio*. As such, the process of *inventio* is one of ardent planning and foresight. To quote Laurence Dreyfus, "invention is work, elaboration is play. While invention requires foresight, planning, consistency, savvy, and seriousness of purpose, elaboration is content with elegance, an associative logic, and an eye

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[125] Laurence Dreyfus, *Bach and the Patterns of Invention*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 4.
[126] Ibid., 9.

for similarities."[127] Our prior analysis of the rhythmic, melodic, and harmonic construction of the subject of Bach's Passacaglia in C Minor reflects a great deal of intentionality in the process of *inventio*. The periodic structure, the subtle contrasts between the antecedent and consequent phrase, and the relentless trochaic rhythmic render the ostinato subject well-disposed for Bach's spontaneous genius to show forth in the process of *elaboratio*.

Elaboratio: **Understanding the Dynamic of Development in the Variations**

Having examined the intrinsic merits of the ground bass theme, let us turn our attention to the ways in which the theme was elaborated upon in the ensuing variations. In doing so, I will consider the interpretations of a few select analysts, and I will propose a reading of my own that is specifically oriented toward primary rhetoric as it pertains to the architecture of the Passacaglia. In order to do this, I will propose a formal scheme that divides this work into six composite sections. I will then show how each of these six sections correspond to the Quintilian's structural scheme of an oration. I will give consideration to the small musico-rhetorical *figurae* within each variation. However, these considerations of secondary rhetoric will be analyzed not as an end in themselves, but as a means of grasping an understanding of primary rhetoric in which the composite parts are understood in relation to the whole.

One of the primary ways in which Bach achieved a formal dynamic of development in the context of the Passacaglia in C minor was through his treatment of rhythm. Though continuous variations forms allow the composer a

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[127] Dreyfus, "Bach and the Patterns of Invention," 22.

good deal of artistic license, there are two defining criteria: a single unwavering

theme, and repetitions of the theme that feature some sort of variation. Bach's

treatment of rhythm in this work supports both of the aforementioned criteria.

Michael Radulescu noted that the inexorable stability of the theme in the piece as

a whole is mirrored by the steady trochaic rhythm of the theme itself.[128] Bach's

strategic modulation of rhythm throughout the course of the Passacaglia supports

the formal demand for variation. In particular, the gradual increase in rhythmic

activity throughout the first six variations of the piece establishes a clear sense of

directionality at the outset.

     In a 1989 article entitled, "The variation principle in J.S. Bach's

Passacaglia in C minor BWV 582," Yoshitake Kobayashi endeavored to

understand the architecture of this passacaglia through the parameter of rhythm

alone. In this article, Kobayashi credited Christoph Wolff with the "discovery and

convincing explication of the ordering principles in Bach's music" as well as an

analysis of the "architectonic construction of Bach's Passacaglia for organ."[129]

However, Kobayashi noted the extreme complexity of Wolff's analysis on the

grounds that it dealt with thematic placement in the texture, variation of the

theme, textural density, contrapuntal treatment of the theme, and "motivic

working-out in rhythmic/melodic and harmonic dimensions."[130] Despite

Kobayashi's approval of Wolff's method, he proposed a simpler interpretive

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[128]Michael Radulescu, "On the Form of Johann Sebastian Bach's Passacaglia in C minor," *The Organ Yearbook* 11 (April 1980): 95.

[129] Yoshitake Kobayashi, "The Variation Principle in J.S. Bach's Passacaglia in C minor BWV 582," In *Bach Studies*, ed. Don O. Franklin and Daniel R. Melamed (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 62.

[130] Ibid., 63.

approach to the Passacaglia by means of a "single overarching constructive principle" rather than a multi-faceted system such as Wolff's. Kobayashi identified rhythm as the governing principle that might afford a unified reading of the piece. He posits that momentum in the piece is built primarily through an increase of rhythmic intensity and successive attack activity.[131]

Though Kobayashi's desire to find a simpler alternative to Wolff's overly-complex analysis is well-founded, some problems arise when one seeks to analyze the form of this work on the grounds of rhythm alone. Though an increase in rhythmic intensity gives directionality at the beginning of the piece, the sixteenth-note level of subdivision is at such an early point in the piece occurs too early in the piece to be regarded as a climax. Further, there are many instances where other musical parameters have a far more pronounced effect than rhythm. For example, while variations 2 and 3 are rhythmically identical, directionality is created through a shift in contour and a subtle reharmonization. Similarly, variations 4 and 5 both are both comprised of dactylic rhythm, but variation is achieved through a widening of intervals and a change in texture. Although rhythm is a highly prominent parameter in determining the form of this work, it is an exaggeration to isolate rhythm as a sole governing principle.

Texture is of arguably equal importance in determining the form of this work. Radulescu's analysis, entitled "On the Form of Johann Sebastian Bach's Passacaglia in C Minor," focuses heavily on texture and demonstrates ways in which fluid movement from one texture to another creates a sense of shape. Radulescu's division of the passacaglia into local subgroups based on texture is

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[131] Ibid., 65.

particularly useful in articulating the large form of work. The idea of understanding the work as a whole in relationship to its individual parts is crucial to any formal analysis that seeks to employ primary rhetoric. Because the passacaglia as a genre is continuous and monothematic by definition, there are no standard divisions into smaller composite parts as would be found in a sonata or rondo form. Therefore, part of the task of the analyst is to determine appropriate subgroupings within the work as a whole. Though there are multiple interpretive possibilities regarding the division of the Passacaglia into composite parts, I would like to take Radulescu's proposed scheme of division as the basis for my own analysis.

Figure 3.3: A Formal Overview of the Passacaglia

FUNCTION	GROUPINGS	#	FIGURES[132]	SALIENT FEATURES OF INDIVIDUAL VARIATIONS
Exordium	**Group 1** (Increase in density, rhythmic intensity, and polyphony; decrease in harmonic tension)	Var. 1 (m. 1-8)	*Unisono*	Monophonic statement of theme
		Var. 2 (m. 9-16)	*Dubitatio*	
		Var. 3 (m. 17-24)	*Dubitatio* (Reharmonized)	
		Var. 4 (m. 25-32)	*Figura Suspirans* (8th note)	
		Var. 5 (m. 33-40)	*Figura Corta* (Stepwise)	
		Var. 6 (m. 41-48)	*Figura Corta* (Leaping)	
Narratio	**Group 2** (Shift from figuration to polyphony)	Var. 7 (m. 49-56)	*Figura Suspirans* (16th note) (Ascending)	Complete saturation of sixteenth note subdivision

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[132] Figures identified by Joel Speerstra in "Bach and the Pedal Clavichord."

		Var. 8 (m. 57-64)	*Figura Suspirans* (Descending)	
		Var. 9 (m. 65-72)	*Figura Suspirans* (Contrary Motion)	
		Var. 10 (m. 73-80)	*Figura Suspirans* (Melodically Disjunct)	
Probatio	**Group 3** (Shift from homophony to polyphony)	Var. 11 (m. 81-88)	*Transitus* (In soprano)	The ground bass theme functions as accompaniment.
		Var. 12 (m. 89-96)	*Transitus* (In alto)	The ground bass theme is placed in the soprano.
		Var. 13 (m. 97-104)	*Superjectio*	Golden section of the first 21 variations.
Disputatio	**Group 4** (Shift from polyphony to unison)	Var. 14 (m. 105-112)	*Circulo Mezzo*	Theme is obscured by placement in the alto voice.
		Var. 15 (m. 113-120)		The theme is further obscured by *stile brise* fragmentation.
		Var. 16 (m. 121-128)	*Unisono*	Reduction to a monophonic texture.
Conclusio	**Group 5** (Shift from [homophony + figuration] to [polyphony + figuration])	Var. 17 (m. 129-136)	*Congeries*	The theme returns to the bass voice, in the original trochaic rhythm.
		Var. 18 (m. 137-144)	*Transitus* (16th note triplets)	The perpetual sixteenth-note sextuplets render this the rhythmic climax of the piece.
	Group 6 (Shift from	Var. 19 (m. 145-		

	homophony to [homophony + polyphony + figuration])	152)		
		Var. 20 (m. 153-160)		
		Var. 21 (m. 161-168)		
	Fugue	Var. 22 (Fugue) (m. 169-293)		

Having identified that the form of this piece is primarily determined by the perpetual presence of the ground bass theme, Radulescu proposes a division of this work into six different subgroups. It must be noted that the unadorned opening statement of the theme will be referred to as the first variation for the purposes of numbering in this paper. Group 1, spanning Variations 1-6, is characterized by an increase in density, rhythmic intensity, and polyphony; and a decrease in harmonic tension. Group 2, spanning Variations 7-10, represents a shift from figuration to polyphony. Group 3 consists of Variations 11-13 and features motion from homophony to polyphony. Group 4 spans Variations 14-16 and features a shift from polyphony to unison. Group 5, consisting of Variations 17-18, moves from a combination of homophony and figuration to a combination of polyphony and figuration. Finally, Group 6 spans Variations 19-21 and features a shift from homophony to an admixture of homophony, polyphony, and figuration. In establishing the macrocosmic form of this piece, he defends the notion that the concluding fugue ought not be regarded as a separate, individual movement, but as the twenty-second and final variation.

Group I: *Exordium*

Group 1 (Variations 1-6) can be understood as an *exordium,* that is, an introduction in which the audience is "eased into" the idea. Rather than thrusting an audience abruptly into a heated discourse, Ancient Greek rhetoricians understood the merits of priming the audience.[133] By virtue of beginning with an unadorned statement of the theme (*unisono*), the Passacaglia offers the listener a gentle and gradual introduction. Furthermore, the progressive increase in rhythmic intensity between variations 2 and 6 allows Group 1 to function as a period of time during which the listener is progressively guided into the discourse.

In order to achieve a subtle growth between the monophonic Variation 1 and the four-voice Variation 2, Bach chose a rhythmic figure whose very title indicates its rhythmic weakness: the *dubitatio*. This title for this figure is borrowed from Quintilian's *Institutio*, and is defined by Forkel as "an uncertain sentiment" that can be expressed "through a lingering on a certain point in the music."[134] By virtue of entering on the second half of the third beat of m. 8, the initial entrance of the upper three voices is imbued with a character of hesitancy.

Figure 3.4: *Dubitatio*, mm. 8-10

[133] Anna Paradiso Laurin, "Classical Rhetoric in Baroque Music" (PhD diss., Royal College of Music in Stockholm, 2012), XXVII.

[134] Bartel, "Musica Poetica," 244.

In this instance, the *dubitatio* also serve as a subtle way of ushering harmonic tension into the Passacaglia. The subtlety of the harmonic tension results both from the brief duration of the suspension (a single beat) and from the fact that all dissonances are prepared. Bach's decision to deploy the *dubitatio* for two consecutive variations further contributes to the gradualism of his approach. While the rhythm and texture of the two variations is identical, the harmonic chromaticism is more pronounced, particularly in the deceptive resolution of a V^7/VI to iv between mm. 17 and 18, as seen below in Figure 3.5.

Figure 3.5: Reharmonization, mm. 16-18

V^7/VI   iv

After the figure of the *dubitatio* has pervaded variations 2 and 3, the *figura suspirans* is introduced at the eighth note level of subdivision in variation 4. The *figura suspirans*, which is imitative of a sigh, is only incrementally rhythmically stronger than the *dubitatio*. Like the *dubitatio*, the *suspirans* begins on the offbeat. However, the rhythmic saturation is greater, given that a new note sounds on each eighth note pulse throughout the fourth variation. The *suspirans* of the fourth variation serves as a keen bridge between the rhythmically weak *dubitatio* that characterized variations 2 and 3 and the rhythmically robust *figura corta* that prevails throughout variations 5 and 6. The *corta*, Italian for "short," is defined by

Johann Gottfried Walther as "three rapid notes, [the first] of which has a duration equal to that of the other two [combined]."[135]

Figure 3.6: *Figura Corta*

      We recall that Bach used the *dubitatio* in both variation 2 and variation 3, yet he distinguished the latter from the former by means of a chromatic reharmonization. In like manner, the *figura corta* is used for two consecutive variations, but with a heightened intensity on the latter variation. While the *corta* in variation 5 features either stepwise motion or repeated notes, in variation 6, the same figure is employed amid a leaping contour. Another way in which the intensity of the *figura corta* is heightened between variations 5 and 6 has to do with the treatment of texture. In variation 5, the texture is largely comprised of pairs of voices moving in parallel thirds and sixths. However, in variation 6, each voice is rhythmically independent of the others, and the entrance of individual voices is staggered in a more sporadic fashion. Even the ground bass, which hitherto has been rhythmically unaltered, is recast in leaping, offbeat gesture.

Figure 3.7: Altered Ground Bass of Variation 6

[135] Ibid., quoting Walther's *Lexikon*.

In summary, variations 1 through 6 function as a skillful yet transparent introduction or presentation of the subject matter of the work. If one holds to the analogy of oration or testimony, one might acknowledge that this exposition or *exordium* is one of extreme and even brutal honesty, for the subject is presented in unison, with no accompanying gestures to mask or soften any potential defects of the theme. However, the vulnerability of this presentation serves as a testimony to the integrity of the ground bass subject, in that its intrinsic merits as a theme are already proven before any accompanying variations are superimposed. Over the course of these six variations, a gradual increase in intensity is achieved through the manipulation of rhythm and texture. If the intention of an *exordium* is to introduce a subject or idea and to cause an audience to "warm up" to said subject or idea, then variations 1 through 6 of this Passacaglia certainly fit those criteria.

Group 2: *Narratio*

Following the *exordium* of an oration is the *narratio*. Here, the speaker's point of view—or in this case, the composer's, is stated overtly and expounded upon. For example, in the context of a trial, a prosecutor might present a problem or dilemma throughout the course of an *exordium*, but the *narratio* is the point at which the prosecutor might formally direct an accusation toward the defendant.[136] Rhetorically speaking, one might regard Radulescu's Group 2, spanning Variations 7-10, as the *narratio* of the Passacaglia. At this point in the Passacaglia, the increase in rhythmic intensity that occurred throughout Group 1 reaches a plateau, as Variation 7 is entirely saturated with sixteenth note

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[136] Ibid., XXX.

subdivisions of the beat. Radulescu characterized the trajectory of Group 2 as a movement from figuration to polyphony. Though the upper three voices move toward an increasingly polyphonic idiom, the ground bass theme remains in the bass voice for the entirety of Group 2 and it maintains the same rhythm throughout. The resulting effect of this is that, amid the increasing rhythmic activity of the upper three voices, the listener's ear is directed increasingly toward the sturdiness of the ground bass theme. Rhetorically speaking, this portrays the increasing and unwavering strength of the ground bass subject and places it on firm footing in the mind of the listener.

In analyzing the function of various figures in the *exordium*, I noted a couple of instances in which the same figure was used in two consecutive variations yet manipulated to achieve different effects. Throughout the course of *narratio*, only one musico-rhetorical figure is invoked—namely, the *figura suspirans*. Though a common figure is held throughout the *narratio*, momentum is achieved by a perpetual increase in contrapuntal complexity. In variation 7, the figure is presented in ascending form, whereas in variation 8, it is presented in descending form. However, variation 8 is contrapuntally heightened by the increasing frequency of stretti.[137] In variation 9, the figure is presented in multiple voices simultaneously, and in contrary motion. In variation 10, the *suspirans* receives a treatment similar to what the *corta* received in variation 6: the figure is presented in a melodically disjunct fashion, and the ground bass ostinato has been recast in the appropriate figuration.

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[137] Speerstra, "Bach and the Pedal Clavichord," 142.

Figure 3.8: Altered Ground Bass of Variation 10

It has previously been stated that an *exordium* is the part of an oration or testimony in which an idea is presented and in which the audience is "warmed up" to said idea. The *narratio*, by contrast, is the portion in the discourse in which factual information is delivered in a plain and focused fashion. It is fitting, then, that figuration be treated with a certain economy of means. In this case, one particular musical figure occupies the whole of the *narratio*.

Group 3: *Probatio*

Following the confident and bold *narratio*, orators were trained to deliver a *probatio* in which the premises presented in the *narratio* were proven or confirmed.[138] For example, here, a prosecutor might present an item of supporting evidence that vindicates their accusation against the defendant. Group 3, spanning Variations 11-13 functions as the *probatio* in this work. At this point the subject of discourse—the ground bass theme—has been gradually introduced throughout the *exordium* of Group 1 and confidently presented throughout the *narratio* of Group 2. Throughout Group 3, the strength of the ground bass theme must be proven or verified by the composer. Here, Bach proves the integrity of the ground bass subject by presenting it in a variety of different manifestations and for the first time in this piece, presents the theme in a voice other than the bass voice. Bach first tests the integrity of the ground bass theme in Variation 11 by casting it in a purely accompanimental role. Here, the lower three voices play short quarter-

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[138] Bartel, "Musica Poetica," XXXI.

note length punctuation on beats one and three while a steady stream of violinistic sixteenth notes form a countermelody in the soprano voice. Variation 12 is particularly notable, as this is the point at which, for the first time in the piece, the theme is cast in a voice other than the bass. By placing the ground bass theme in the soprano for Variations 12 and 13, Bach proves that this theme is effective not only as a bass line, or a harmonic foundation, but as a melodic theme that can be harmonized by undergirding voices. If we consider the portion of the Passacaglia that precedes the concluding fugue, there are a total of 21 variations. Variation 13, which is the climatic variation of the *probatio*, also functions as the golden section of the 21 variations that precede the fugue.[139] Hence, even Bach's proportional placement of the *probatio* in Passacaglia is demonstrates the success of the ostinato.

Group 4: *Disputatio*

Following the rhetorical *probatio* is the *disputatio*, in which the orator or composer has an opportunity to play the role of Devil's Advocate.[140] In Variations 14-16, which constitute Group 4 of the Passacaglia, Bach establishes a *disputatio* through a gradual dismantling of the theme. The first step of disintegration occurs in Variation 14, where the theme is hidden away in the alto voice. Not only is the theme obscured by its placement in the middle of the texture, but it is further obscured by the fact that it is presented in a *circulo mezzo* figuration, in which the ostinato is interwoven with neighbor tones and passing tones.[141] In Variation 15,

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[139] Williams, *The Organ Music of J.S. Bach,* 186.
[140] Paradiso Laurin, "Classical Rhetoric in Baroque Music," XXXI.
[141] Dietrich Bartel, *Musica Poetica: Musical-rhetorical Figures in German Baroque Music,* (Lincoln: Universiy Nebraska Press, 1997), 219.

Bach obscures the ground bass theme even further by means of a *stile brise*

texture. Here, the ground bass theme is lightly couched within an arpeggiating

figure played by the keyboardist's left hand. Finally, in Variation 16, the

arpeggiated figuration is maintained, but the texture is reduced to a single voice.

The result effect is that the ground bass theme is implied rather than stated

overtly. By progressively disintegrating the theme between Variations 14 and 16,

Bach renders a *disputatio* in which it appears that the theme has disintegrated or

failed.

Groups 5 & 6: *Conclusio*

The final rhetorical stage of an oration—or in this case, composition—is

the *peroratio* or *conclusio,* in which the subject or theme is presented as having

triumphed over the opposition encountered during the *disputatio*. In the case of

Bach's Passacaglia, this *conclusio* occurs in three stages: Group 5, Group 6, and

the concluding fugue. At the beginning Group 5, a sense of recapitulation is

achieved by the return of the ground bass theme to the bass voice, in its original

sustained, trochaic rhythm. This strong and transparent presentation of the ground

bass dispels any fear of its demise that may have been experienced during the

disputatio. After the reintroduction of the ground bass theme in Variation 17, the

perpetual drive of sixteenth note triplets during Variation 18 in the *transitus*

figuration brings about the climax of rhythmic intensity for the entire piece. Once

this peak in rhythmic intensity has been achieved at the end of Group 5, Group 6

features a progressive increase in density. This crescendo in density culminates in

a five-voice texture throughout Variation 21, and an 8-note sonority at its conclusion. The climax of rhythmic intensity in Group 5 and the climax of textural density in Group 6 combine to create a triumphant and convincing *conclusio.*

While Groups 5 and 6 might have sufficiently confirmed the success or victory of the ground bass theme on their own merits, the true apotheosis of the Passacaglia comes in the form of its concluding fugue. Here, the versatility of the Passacaglia is shown to an even greater degree when it is repurposed as the subject for a permutation fugue. In the first twenty-one variations this subject proved successful in homophonic, monophonic, and free contrapuntal textures. In the fugue that constitutes the final variation, Bach demonstrates that this ostinato can also be retooled to function as a fugue subject. Not only is the theme cast as the subject of a fugue, but as the subject of a permutation fugue with two additional recurring countersubjects.

A Defense of the Rhetorical Interpretation

It has been stated above that Bach was neither an academic, nor was he a rhetorician by trade. Lorenz Mizler, a student of Bach, claimed that he "[Bach] did not occupy himself with deep theoretical speculations on music, but was all the stronger in the practice of the art."[142] This criticism, dating from the middle of the eighteenth century, might seem to undermine my analytical approach. I do not mean to suggest Bach was consulting a textbook of rhetoric as he composed (or improvised) the Passacaglia, and further, the method I've outlined for the rhetorical analysis has historical precedent, for Johann Mattheson used this same

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[142] Dreyfus, "Bach and the Patterns of Invention," 9.

hermeneutic in his analysis of a Marcello aria. Mattheson's analysis was met with

opposition by Mizler, the same pupil of J.S. Bach who was cited above.

Mattheson responded to Mizler's objection in the following words:

> Marcello, to be sure, has given as little thought to the six parts of an oration in composing this aria I quoted in the Kern, as in his other works; but one concedes that I have quite possibly shown how they must be present in the melody. That is enough. Experienced masters proceed in an orderly manner, even when they do not think about it. One can observe this in everyday writing and reading where no one gives spelling a second thought.[143]

It is indeed true that Bach was most likely not composing this piece from a

rhetoric textbook, and he was not likely thinking of Quintilian's model of

oration when crafting the Passacaglia. However, considerations of

proportion and affectation could not have been far from his mind.

However, as Mattheson stated above, a seasoned author, orator, or

composer need not think actively about matters of grammar or syntax.

Another fundamental goal of this analysis was to steer our musico-

rhetorical analysis from gestural considerations of secondary rhetoric to

broader considerations of primary rhetoric. Throughout the course of this

analysis, we considered the significance of the effects produced by

specific *figurae*. However, the figures were not analyzed as ends in

themselves, but rather as a means of understanding how an individual,

composite part relates to the work as a whole. As such, I have

demonstrated a method that employs secondary rhetoric in the service of

primary rhetoric.

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[143] Bonds, "Wordless Rhetoric," 86.

CHAPTER 4

Conclusion

The passacaglia's origins and evolution differ vastly from other genres, such as the sonata or symphony. Though it began as an improvisatory folk tradition, it developed into a highly cultivated art form. Furthermore, while much of its conventions are strictly defined, others are left open-ended. To be specific, the unwavering presence of the ostinato is a very strict and binding convention, yet no other organizational conventions bind the composer. While the formal concept of the passacaglia is simple, the execution of this paradigm requires great skill. A composer must balance the demands of respecting the integrity of the ostinato while creating sufficient contrasts, so as to avoid boredom. In order to create a convincing passacaglia, a composer must be attentive not only to the details of individual variations, but to the broad architecture of the work as a whole. The success of a passacaglia rests on a proper relationship between its small, composite parts and the large, cohesive whole. Such a relationship can be well understood by examining the principles of rhetoric—principles that have been adapted and invoked by musicians for several centuries.

Having examined the broad history of rhetoric, we recall that, at its foundation in Greco-Roman Antiquity, it was intended as a form of persuasion. However, in both antiquity and modernity, the persuasive element of rhetoric has often been usurped by the ornamental or

decorative element. In other words, primary rhetoric has often been eclipsed by an inordinate preoccupation with secondary rhetoric. Throughout history, when principles of oratory rhetoric have been applied to music, there has likewise been a tendency to focus on figuration rather than structure in form. Using Bach's Passacaglia in C Minor, BWV 582, as a case study, I've sought to apply the principle of primary rhetoric to the passacaglia. In so doing, we proposed a scheme of division within the Passacaglia that corresponds with the structure of oration outlined by Quintilian. We further noted the important relationship between the process of *inventio* and *elaboratio*. Throughout the process of this analysis, we have not eschewed the study of figures. Rather, we have placed them at the service of structure and form—at the service of primary rhetoric.

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