

Musica poetica

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Abstract: *In the period between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, musica poetica meant studying composition, i.e. Kompositionslehre (Mattheson). The origin of the term can be found in the writings of Nikolaus Listenius (Musica, 1537). The new vision of the pedagogy of music (drawn from the writings of Burmeister, Lippius, Nucius, Kircher, Bernhard et al.), was centered on the concepts of baroque aesthetics: rhetoric, the affect theory, the world of symbol, and allegory, the rhetorical figure. Perpetuated in the eighteenth century in rhetoric-oriented theories (supported by Walther, Mattheson, Scheibe), musica poetica lasts about two centuries in German music theory and practice.*

Key words: *musica poetica, rhetoric, baroque music*

1. Introduction

Musica poetica completes, along with *musica theorica* and *musica practica*, the Aristotelic triad of the categories of human thinking: theory, practice, and poetics (creation).

The German Renaissance treaties addressed to the composer as *musicus poeticus*, systematizes the ways of the pedagogy of composition through the rhetorical principles. In the sixteenth century, the tendency for rhetoric to become a model to follow had appeared in the visual arts and poetic art, which also caused composers to adopt the milestones of rhetorical discourse as models of composition. In search of a methodology, the new branch of music composition theory – *musica poetica* – will therefore resort to rhetorical terminology; a whole taxonomy of rhetorical figures and tropes is taking shape now.

Composers and theorists apply in the art of sound borrowed norms from the art of the word. This is natural, because vocal music starts from the text, whose rhetoric transfers over the music and becomes musical rhetoric when properly processed. A role in the establishment of the new style that proclaims the close connection between music and word, had in the 16th century, *musica reservata*

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and in the 17th century, *stile rappresentativo*. With the eighteenth century, purely instrumental music will be built on the same patterns of literature and poetry. This is what Mattheson called *Klangrede*, i.e. sounding discourse.

2. Outlining the doctrine *musica poetica*

Musica poetica, encountered from ancient sources, "proclaims the well-known and appreciated connection between music and speech in the learning of compositional art" (Sandu-Dediu 2013, 67).

Regarding this doctrine, an impressive number of musical treaties appeared in Germany, between 1600 and 1800. Sporadically, the notion of *musica poetica* applied to the art of composing is introduced, for the first time, by Nikolaus Listenius (b.approx. 1510), in his work *Musica* (1537); *musica poetica* is the third category added to the previous *musica theorica (naturalis)* and *musica practica (artificialis)*.

Joachim Burmeister (1564-1629) is the first theorist to propose a systematic basis for *musica poetica* in three treaties (1599, 1601, 1606), of which the last one even entitled *Musica poetica*; he recognizes in this branch of music teaching as the way to compose "in order to sway the hearts and spirits of individuals into various dispositions" (Bartel 1997, 10).

Johannes Lippius (1585-1612), in *Synopsis musicae novae* (1612), considers rhetoric a formal basis for structuring a composition, and Johannes Nucius, in *Musices poeticae* (1613), analyzes various Renaissance masters (from Dunstable to Lassus) as exponents of a new musical-rhetorical tradition.

Important treatise authors reveal an elevated theory of style in the seventeenth century, starting with Christoph Bernhard (1628-1692), who, in *Tractatus compositionis augmentatus* (approx. 1660), distinguishes between *stylus gravis* or *antiquus*, illustrated by Palestrina, and *stylus luxurians* or *modernus* (specific of the Baroque). Bernhard achieves the unification of the outlook on the rhetorical figure (*Figurenlehre*), in Burmeister's German tradition, with the Italian counterpoint style.

Athanasius Kircher includes in *Musurgia universalis* (1650) a section entitled *Musurgia rhetorica*, to illustrate the musical-rhetorical analogy, through the vitality of the rhetorical concept: the baroque composer must find the idea, as a suitable basis for a composition, conducive to the arrangement of the material according to a rhetorical discourse. Kircher introduces the notion of style, finding eight musical styles in agreement with the expressiveness and usefulness of each one: *ecclesiasticus*, *canonicus*, *phantasticus*, *madrigalescus*, *melismaticus*, *hyposchematicus*, *symphonicus* and *dramaticus* or *recitativus*.

Another Baroque theorist, Johann Gottfried Walther, states in *Praecepta* (1708) the primary objective of the discipline: "*Musica poetica* or musical composition is a mathematical science through which a pleasant and correct harmony of the notes is brought to paper in order that it may later be sung or played, thereby appropriately moving the listeners to Godly devotion as well as to please and delight both mind and soul /.../" (Bartel 1997, 22). This is where the symbolic properties of the musical elements, their ability to awaken an emotional state, an affect come into question. *The affect*, according to the German historian G. Frotscher, refers to those aspects of poetry, which "combine all the impulses and spiritual evolutions, both the feelings and the elements of the will, the ethical and religious sense and the like" (Toduță 1973, 71).

The interdependence between music and rhetoric will continue to develop in Germany, thanks to theorists such as Johann Mattheson (1681-1764) or Johann Adolf Scheibe (1708-1776). They apply to the musical works the milestones of articulating the discourse, as perpetuated by Cicero and Quintilian.

Adapting the structure of rhetoric to music, according to Quintilian's concept, Mattheson retains the same number of five stages, largely analogous to classical rhetoric (Table 1).

Quintilian	Mattheson
1. Inventio (determining the subject)	1. Inventio (meter, tonality, theme)
2. Dispositio (arrangement, disposition)	2. Dispositio (ordering sections)
3. Elocutio (style, ideas in sentences)	3. Elaboratio (adding figures)
4. Memoria (memory)	4. Decoratio (ornamentation)
5. Pronuntiatio (presentation)	5. Executio (execution)

Table 1. *The stages of rhetoric applicable to the structure of the composition*

2.1. *Musica poetica* in the Baroque era

Musica poetica (from Greek *poieo*, meaning *to make, produce, create*) is a branch of the music theory developed by German educators from the Reformation era, modeled on the principles of rhetoric, being part of the humanist program in the Protestant Latin schools (*Lateinschulen*). The motto of rhetoric-based pedagogy was *praeceptum-exemplum-imitatio* (learn a principle, find and memorize an example, then imitate it). Transplanting this guiding idea into *musica poetica*, the composer "finds out the means by which to configure a piece artistically and to express a text musically" (Sandu-Dediu 2013, 69). Theorists of *musica poetica* initially provided their disciples with the vocabulary needed to analyze and extract those applicable procedures, then in their own compositions.

Integrating the main rhetorical concepts into musical composition and execution is, in fact, one of the main features of the Baroque period. The purpose

of promoting rhetoric is the consequence of the need for systematization at the levels of structure and means of expression, often exaggerated to stereotyping.

Beyond the basic level, that of strictly teaching the principles of counterpoint and the use of consonance and dissonance, *musica poetica* represents the art of completing a unitary work, with a coherent form, based on the schema *beginning-middle-end*, according to the discursive model stated by Aristotle (*Poetics*, printed approx. at 1500) and taken over by G. Dressler (*Praecepta musicae poeticae*, 1563): *exordium-medium-finish* (McCreless 2002, 853). Quoting Claude Palisca (2006, 51), we find that "*musica poetica* implied that composing is more than making counterpoint, that the composer addresses a message, like the author of a poem or an oration, to a reader or listener."

Since the 16th century, *musica poetica* describes the teaching methods of some singers experienced both in the art of composition and interpretation (e.g. Martin Agricola, Hermann Finck, Heinrich Faber, Gallus Dressler, and Seth Calvisius Joachim Burmeister).

In the transition period between the Renaissance and the Baroque, music remained, in essence, religious and impersonal. As a result, certain aesthetic-musical objectives have been outlined, which will be pursued in the discipline *musica poetica*:

- Subordination of forms and means of expression for the transmission of philosophical and religious ideas and feelings.
- The attribution of symbolic-allegorical meanings to the musical elements, through the theological interpretation of the numerical proportions, trait led to the heyday in the Bachian creation.
- Familiarity with the principles and terminology of rhetoric, cultivation of a concept of the musical-rhetorical figure.
- Investing the composition with the function of arousing an affective reaction, of determining the listener to participate actively, to become emotionally involved in the presented "musical action".

German musicologists from the 17th-18th centuries adopted the concept according to which music possesses affective and formative valences, following the model of the ancient *ethos*.

Aristotle perceived *ars rhetorica* as the action of discovering and putting into practice an arsenal of means of persuasion, for the purpose of persuading any type of audience

An influential spirit of the time, René Descartes, defined in *Les passions de l'âme* (1649), the six primary passions – wonder, love, hate, desire, joy, sadness – the other passions being derived from them. By resorting to specific means, "the musicians will tend /... / towards the rational rendering of passions, to objectify the emotions, which they will not leave in their will, but will seek precise formulas to express them" (Sandu-Dediu 2013, 79).

Thus, the musicians took over the stated triple purpose of rhetoric: to train (*docere*), to delight (*delectare*) and move (*movere*).

Teaching the discipline *musica poetica* was intended for disciples familiar with rhetorical methods. Thus, even the simplest allusions in musical works such as the Lutheran chorus, were sufficient to establish and decipher a religious or philosophical context.

In the eighteenth century, rhetoric would become a "metaphor to guide the shaping of musical form" (McCreless 2002, 870). The particular concern attributed to the discipline called *rhetoric* will also impose the two basic concepts: that of affect (*Affektenlehre*) and that of the musical-rhetorical figure (*Figurenlehre*).

2.2. The Rhetorical figure (*Figurenlehre*)

There is a reciprocal relationship between the musical figure and the affect. At its core, the history of *musica poetica* was presented as the history of the musical figure, created for the purpose of transmitting a certain form of expression. In its turn, the affect was not regarded as a spontaneous emanation, but was the consequence of precise features of the musical composition, resulting from the manipulation of the figures of the sound, the tone, the rhythm, the meter, the elaboration of the counterpoint, the form (fugue, menuet, sarabande) of the metaphor, and so on.

The multitude of musical figures, over 100 in number, "is a mixture of syntactic and semantic aspects" (V. Sandu-Dediu 2013, 68). In relation to their semantic investiture, musical figures are suggestive, metaphorical, based on symbols, including numerical proportions. The figure opens the ways of some analogies, through which "an event in the musical sphere /... / is analogous to an event in the spiritual sphere" (Bukofzer 1939, 9). Analogies could be performed at all musical parameters: "the analogies in music may refer only to one voice or to all voices, to the rhythm alone, to the harmony alone, to the setting of an instrumentation alone, or simply to the intensity of sound. It is also possible to combine some or all of these elements" (Bukofzer 1939, 9).

The evolution of the musical figure refers to the transformations of the syntactic-semantic relation, by passing from the simple function *decoratio*, to the semantic investigation, in accordance with the doctrine of affections (*Affektenlehre*).

2.2.1. Joachim Burmeister (1564-1629)

In the way of restoring the rhetorical tradition of *musica poetica*, the most significant initiative to combine music and rhetoric belongs to Joachim Burmeister. He is considered the founder of tradition *Figurenlehre* and pioneer of musical analysis.

In the treatise *musica poetica* (1606), Burmeister laid the theoretical basis for a true taxonomy of musical-rhetorical figures. Burmeister argued that the musical figure could work exactly as an analytical instrument. An essential feature of the figure, which concerns its ornamental function, is that "it departs from the simple manner of composition, and with elegance assumes and adopts a more ornate character" (McCreless 2002, 856). For most musical figures, Burmeister borrows Greek terms from classical rhetoric, looking for similarities with musical techniques.

The classification of musical-rhetorical figures is divided into three categories: *formae harmoniae*, *formae melodiae*, *figure tam harmoniae quam melodie*. From the analytical perspective of the 20th-21st centuries, the same figures would be classified according to criteria related to their functionality in the economy of a work:

- Types of writing: counterpoint figurations (*symblesma*, *syncopa* / *syneresis*, *pleonasmus*, *fauxbourdon*, *congeries*) imitative, fugate techniques (*fuga realis*, *fuga imaginaria*, *metalepsis*, *hypallage*, *apocope*, *parembole*), textural (*noema*, *analepsis*, *mimesis*, *anadiplosis*, *anaploce*), ostinato (*anaphora*).
- Means of emphasis: repetition / sequence (*palilogy*, *climax*, *auxesis*).
- Expressive-descriptive, allegorical elements: prototype images (*hypotyposis*); chromaticism (*pathopoeia*, *parrhesia*), the silence (*aposiopesis*) the game of modal ambitus (*hyperbole*, *hypobole*) et al.

Although this compendium of figures reveals its limits, remaining at a descriptive, surface level, however, the taxonomic model developed by Burmeister has several qualities:

- it creates bridges between rhetorical figures and their musical correspondents;
- it opens the scientific ways of classifying musical figures;
- it establishes the relationship between the figure and a certain affective content.

2.2.2. Christoph Bernhard (1628-1692)

With Bernhardt *musica poetica* reaches a new stage. The classification of rhetorical figures is now done according to the new criterion of the musical style: *stylus gravis* (or *antiquus*) – not ornamented, corresponding to *prima pratica* – and *stylus luxurians* (or *stylus modernus*) – ornamented, corresponding to *secunda pratica* – comprising dissonance and expression figures. *Stylus modernus*, in its turn is subdivided into *stylus luxurians communis* (religious style) and *stylus luxurians theatralis* (theatrical style). While *stylus gravis* includes only passage and delay figures (*transitus* and *quasi-transitus*; *syncopatio* and *quasi-syncopatio*) *stylus luxurians* represents a more elaborate counterpoint hypostasis. "Rather, it is an organized collection of

contrapuntal treatments that acquire meaning precisely because they represent the expressive ornamentation of a specific figure in the simpler *stylus gravis*" (McCreless 2002, 864). Among the musical figures related to *stylus luxurians* types of neighboring notes are introduced (*superjectio*, *subsumptio*), figurations (through *anticipatio*, *variatio*), pathetic figures (*passus duriusculus*, *saltus duriusculus*, *cadentia duriuscula*), new figures of silence (*ellipsis*, *abruptio*).

The terminology adopted by Bernhard is closer to the musical specificity of the era than to the rhetoric (e.g. *transitus* or *syncopatio*). The influences acquired during the studies in Italy, in the tradition of Zarlino's counterpoint, as well as the preference for the Latin denomination instead of the Greek one, are the reasons that determined Bernhardt to adapt *Figurenlehre* to the new Italian style (*stylus dramaticus*, *recitativus*), rhetorical par excellence, due to the richness in musical figures.

2.2.3. Johann Mattheson (1681-1764)

Mattheson's vision of approaching rhetorical music will be different from his predecessors. He gets rid of certain ideas he considers obsolete, such as exaggerating the role of the rhetorical figure, considered until then the essence of *musica poetica*. Thus, his attention moves away *elocutio* (the rhetorical figure sector), to *inventio* (*locus topicus*) and *dispositio* (arrangement, form).

Mattheson subscribes to the idea that the primary purpose of music is to express passions, considering that melody and not harmony would be the most effective means in this regard. He thus discusses the musical-rhetorical figure as a means capable of serving, primarily, the melodic expression. Mattheson is considered the first theorist to attribute to the song the central role in teaching the composition. Also supporting the idea of the primacy of the vocal melody over the instrumental one, Mattheson states (in *Der vollkommene Capellmeister*, 1739), that the vocal melody is "the mother" and the instrumental one is "the daughter" (McCreless 2002, 870).

His theory of melody formed the basis of eighteenth-century form theories: "it serves notice that the eighteenth century's interest in rhetoric would be principally as a metaphor to guide the shaping of musical form" (McCreless 2002, 869).

As for form, Mattheson also tried to make it back *dispositio* to the simple dresslerian model: *exordium-mediis-finish*.

3. The decline of *musica poetica*

By the middle of the eighteenth century, the links between rhetoric and the concepts *musica poetica* or *Figurenlehre* start to disappear. Formal and figurative

processes of the musical discourse, related to the sectors *dispositio* and *elaboratio* change and become musical vocabulary elements.

Since the mid eighteenth century, Johann Adolf Scheibe (1708-1776) adapts the musical-rhetorical figure to the nature of the new sensitive style (*empfindsamer Stil*), in contrast to the rigidity promoted by *Affektenlehre*. Scheibe's figures (*exclamatio*, *dubitatio*, *ellipsis*, *repetitio*, *antithesis*, *suspensio*, *interrogatio*, *gradatio* et al.) refer to the expressive qualities of music, often neglected by modern structuralism: the questioning character of the reason for opening; the significance of the simple or varied repetition process; the effect of hesitation and surprise elements, sudden stops, surprising changes of direction of the song, unexpected cadences, or other means that deceive the audience's expectations.

The last theorist of *Figurenlehre*, Johann Forkel (1749-1818), made a final effort to save the figures, detaching them from the vocal music with text, claiming that they do not come from the rhetorical figures of language, but embody significant human experiences through sound.

The 19th century combines the elements of musical rhetoric and grammar into a single entity, *musical structure*.

In the musicology of the twentieth century there is a renewed interest in theorizing the music in rhetorical terms, using nineteenth-century concepts about musical expression and structure.

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