Argumentative Patterns of Musical Discourse Illustrated in Emblematic Creations of the German Baroque

Roxana PEPELEA[1]

Abstract: *The musical rhetoric has experienced a significant evolution during the Baroque period. Any musical genre was considered appropriate for the reproduction of emotional states, from cantata or oratory to works for keyboard instruments. Emotion was not considered a spontaneous emanation, but was based on well-defined resources of the musical composition, including figures of sound, rhythm, meter, figures of tone, modulation, harmonic figures, or counterpoint development, articulation and forms, and new figures, metaphors created to transmit a certain form of expression. The musical figures could also be based on numerical symbols or proportions. In order to promote rhetoric – a domain that any educated person knew – the musical Baroque reveals a systematization of speech and means of expression led to the extreme, up to the creation of patterns, of standardized formulas.*

Keywords: *Baroque, Stylus fantasticus, rhetoric, Buxtehude, Bach*

1. Introduction

The German Baroque period is referential for its argumentative patterns applied to the second canon of traditional rhetoric, *dispositio,* i.e. the planning and argumentation sector in a logical and coherent way (Bartel 1997, 66). In support of this assertion, we can, for example, consider examining works for keyboard instruments, especially organs or harpsichord. The reason is that these tools gave the composer the perfect ground to improvise during the execution of a piece. The resulting complexity of such a musical work is the alternation between fantasy, dancing, and fugue, thus establishing a concise and contrasting form of dialogue.

Brilliant models of argumentation, these types of works can be initially related to the so-called *Stylus fantasticus* (freestyle, unstable), derived from G. Frescobaldi's harpsichord toccatas (1583-1643). He was recognized for having

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[1] PhD, Transilvania University of Braşov, r_pepelea@unitbv.ro

attributed instrumental music the same rhetorical virtues as those of the music with literary support.

Stylus fantasticus was promoted in the second stage of the Baroque era (1650-1700) by the organists in northern Germany (D. Buxtehude, J. Froberger and J. Pachelbel). They conceived their musical discourse after a well-defined rhetorical plan, creating, through syntactic and metro-rhythmic alternations, different argumentative models.

Stylus fantasticus is also attached to some Bachian works from his early creation times, including *Fantasy and Fugue in g minor for Organ, BWV 542*, *Toccata and Fugue in d minor for Organ, BWV 565* and *Passacaglia and Fugue in c minor for Organ, BWV 582*. This style of expression disappeared after 1720, re-emerging in the classical period (1770) under the name *Sturm und Drang*.

2. A rhetorical pattern in *Stylus fantasticus*

The term *Stylus fantasticus* was first used by Athanasius Kircher in the paper *Musurgia universalis*, *sive Ars magna consoni et dissoni* (1650).

The global scheme of the musical works in *Stylus fantasticus* is composed of alternating parts, some in a free, improvising manner – expressing interrogation, tension, agitation – others in a grave austerity – such as the imitation or fugato sections. The alternation between free, figurative, and fixed, polyphonic sections adds to the music extra expression, as it simulates a dialogue between two opposing tendencies, with *pros* and *cons* (Saint-Dizier 2014, 133). Another feature of the *Stylus fantasticus* is the variation of the metric system (e.g., the binary-ternary alternation), with insertion of some dance moves (e.g. *courante, gigue*).

Through these expressive valences, *Stylus fantasticus* left the posterity genuine models of argumentation, musically expressed using rhetorical symbols. Rhetorical symbols are powerful instruments with immediate impact on listeners, with strong persuasion effects (Saint-Dizier 2014, 160). The Rhetorician (the author, the orator) 'follows "the manipulation" of the reader-audience by specific means of the discourse' (V. Sandu-Dediu 2013, 81).

An example of rhetorical argumentation is represented by *Prelude in g minor for the Organ, BuxWV 149*, by Dietrich Buxtehude, considered the quintessence of the relationship between the free, fantasy-like texture, and the measured one, of fugal type. Schematically, the general structure of the discourse of this *Praeludium* is consistent with Table 1:

Section	*Exordium*	*Confirmatio I*		*Confutatio*		*Confirmatio II*	*Peroratio*		
Measure	1	21	50	57	75	80	138	153	157
Texture (Style)	*Fantasia* (ostinato)	Fugue 1 (imit.)	Trans. (recit.)	*Fantasia* (continuo)		Fugue 2 (imitative)	Concl.Coda.Cad.		
Meter	12/8	4/2		2/2		3/2			4/4
Tonal plane	g I	I	V	I	V	I	c I	V = g I#	

Table 1. *Buxtehude*, *Praeludium BuxWV 149, Structure*

Here are the details of this argumentative pattern:

- *Exordium*: a tumultuous introductory section of 20 measures, in a figurative-improvising character. A first subsection of 6 measures is only written for the manual, and the following 12 measures include a grave pedal on a *basso ostinato* of 2 measures:

Fig. 1. *Buxtehude, Praeludium, m. 7-11*

- *Confirmatio I*: ample fugue, in four voices, in a steady tempo (m. 21-50), followed by a transition of 7 measures in recitative-style. The reflexive fugue, in a painful note, appears as a confirmation of the previous part, through its theme, derived from the intervals of the basso ostinato. The musical writing represents a complex polyphony, with a top-down disposition of voices:

Fig. 2. *Buxtehude, Praeludium, Tonal response, m. 23-32*

- *Confutatio*: occurs consecutively to a transition of 7 measures. It is a section in the dance character, in 2/2, formed, again, of two subsections; the first (m. 57-74), in *continuo* type, the second, in the spirit of a dance, over an obstinate motif of a measure, which is repeated in double counterpoint (m. 75-80).

- *Confirmatio II*: a new fugue in 3/2, with dotted rhythm in the style of the French overture (m. 80-138). The voices get into the same order, from top to bottom. The solemn rhythm, as well as the intervals of the theme, emphasize, rhetorically, a painful affection, a depressing atmosphere:

Fig. 3. *Buxtehude, Praeludium, the Confutatio-Confirmatio II junction, m. 77-88*

- *Peroratio*: finally the theme is presented with ornamental-figurative elements that allude to the introduction (according to the meaning of the term *peroratio*: free section which concludes by the recapitulation of an argument). The piece ends with a coda (153) with cadence on a pedal point, *supplementum* (m. 157).

The similarity of the prelude structure to the precepts of the oratories follows the argumentation of the musical discourse in *dispositio*. The emphatic *exordium*, brings *basso ostinato* to the center, forming the background of subsequent transformations. The intonational relationship of the theme of the first fugue with this *ostinato* is clear, so the first fugue becomes a genuine *confirmatio*. The fugue respects the general atmosphere, being in agreement with the dominant affect of the piece, while *confutatio* operates as a contrasting section, using the musical-rhetorical figure of antithesis (*antitheton*), in opposition to the dominant emotion of the piece. This free section that follows the fugue is a typical example of *basso continuo* writing and subtly reintroduces a second fugue, marked *Largo*, with dotted notes; a new *confirmatio* thus emphasizes the dark character of the tonality g minor. *Peroratio* thus concludes with a figurative thematic repetition that leads to the free coda and the final cadence.

3. Rhetorical discourse in *Passacaglia in c minor for the Organ* by J.S. Bach

The creation of the High Baroque (1700-1750) was influenced by the writings in Philosophy, Astronomy and Mathematics. A series of works of this period had a complex symbolic structure. These include *Passacaglia and Fugue in g minor for the Organ*, *BWV 582* (1716), written when Bach was about 30 years old. The 21 variations of the passacaglia are a remembrance of some of the chorales of the *Orgelbüchlein*, which illustrates Christian hope, Savior's expectation, birth, torture, or resurrection. The Austrian organist Michael Rădulescu said that this work is a plea with arguments in favor of imposing the inevitable crucifixion, as a symbol of salvation. The 21 scenes of 8 measures thus reflect, each in its turn, the conclusion consisting in accepting the crucifixion (Rădulescu 1980).

3.1. The symbolic dimension of the *Passacaglia*

There is a strong symbolic dimension associated with the structure of the work. According to Saint-Dizier (2014, 160), these symbols consist of numerical

proportions, metaphors, melogramas, paraphrases, and can be summarized as follows:

- Numerical proportions in melody and rhythm: for example, 3 for Trinity, 7 for the seven days of creation; therefore, 3 × 7 = 21, i.e. the number of stanzas in Passacaglia. The fugue that follows has 12 entries of the main theme, 12 being the reverse of 21.

- Use of symbolic or metaphorical figures in melodic profiles (*hypotyposis*), such as ascending and descending lines, and the symbol of the cross, made up of B-A-C-A or B-A-C-H sounds, corresponding to Bach's melograma.

- The use, in three-stanza groups, of a Lutheran chorale fragment borrowed from *Orgelbüchlein* or other series of chorales that confirm and clarify the semantic substrate of each stanza.

3.2. Passacaglia – argumentative prototype

This work has been the subject of a considerable number of analyses, starting with Nikolaus Forkel (1802) and ending with Peter Williams (1980) (Rumsey 1992, 1). At the level of rhetorical discourse, Passacaglia can be approached from several points of view: musical elaboration based on rhetorical figures, their role in argumentation, as well as comparing it with the chorales from which certain melo-rhythmic formulations seem to derive.

A Passacaglia is based on a vigorous *ostinato*, placed on the bass in the 3/4 measure. The eight measures that make it up represent an exception to the specific dimension of most of the themes of passacaglia or ciaccona, which have a structure of 4 measures. The theme is an indivisible period, with an iambic periodicity, shaped on two melodic slopes balancing each other (Banciu 2006, 164):

Fig. 4. *Theme, sequential repetition (anaphora) on the cross motive (subsumptio)*

Paraphrasing Saint-Dizier (2014, 143), we will summarize the structure of the Passacaglia:

- *Exordium* (m. 1-24): the first three scenes bring us into the general atmosphere. The obstinate bass, as well as the reflexive, introspective counterpoint in predominantly descending slopes, with syncopated and dotted eighths, suggest

pain, decline, negative situations. There are very fine allusions to the Advent chorale *Nun Komm 'der Heiden Heiland, BWV 599* ("Now the Savior descends ...").

- *Narratio* (m. 25-48): introduces the facets of the debate – on the one hand God's dissatisfaction and, on the other, the guilt of humanity that feels abandoned. Scenes 4-6, through brief imitation interventions, take over chorale motifs *Von Gott will not them lassen, BWV 658* ("I do not want to leave God"). In support of the argument, in Scene 6 (41-44), the symbol of the cross appears on the bass, the accentuated sounds of the first times (G, F, A b, G).

- *Propositio* (m. 49-72): the necessity of crucifixion is made clear, rendered, obsessively, by symbols with a strong force of persuasion. In addition to re-asserting the symbol of the cross, one notices, in scenes 7-9, those melodic profiles in the category *hypotyposis*, associated with visual images: combinations of ascending-descending stairs (*anabasis-catabasis*), suggesting prayer and acceptance of divine power. Here we can mention the paraphrase of the Nativity of the Lord chorale – *Von Himmel kam der Engel Schar, BWV 607* ("The angelic crowd came from heaven").

Fig. 5. *Passacaglia, strophe 9, m. 65-66*

- *Confutatio* (m. 73-96): the counter-arguments are inserted in scenes 10-12, and scene 12 is considered the climax of the work. Once it is fragmented, by interposing pauses (*figura suspirans*), the theme is transposed to the upper voice (in strophe 12). Dramatism is increased to despair, through the flashiness of the theme transposed into the acute register. Extracts from the Nativity of the Lord chorale – *Herr Christ, der Ein'ge Gottes Sohn B, WV 601* ("Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God"), reinforce the argumentation.

- *Confirmatio* (m. 97-120): is the time of the sentence – accepting the crucifixion. This is expressed through the quotations from the Easter chorale, *Christ lag in Todesbanden, BWV 625* ("Christ is in bondage to death") which evokes the torture. After the polyphonic density of scenes 13-15, with long descending melodic traces (the cross symbol inserts to be remarked again), writing becomes more airy in the last scene of the group (113-120), suggesting resignation.

- *Peroratio* (m. 121-144): scenes 16-18, concluding the argument, with the meaning of the crucifixion that brings salvation with itself, manifests a rhythmic dynamism. Short, arpeggio motives, taken over by all voices, in a predominantly upward movement correspond to the denouement. In scene 17, the motivational units give the thematic rhetorical figure *subsumptio*:

Fig. 6. *Passacaglia, strophe 17, m. 129-131*

- *Conclusio* (coda) (m. 145-168): symbolizes salvation and celebration in scenes 19-21 by using ascending leaps. A parallel to the Easter chorale is made *Erstanden is der heil'ge Christ, BWV 628* ("Our Holy Lord has Risen"). Passacaglia ends with a dense conclusion, visible in the writing of all the voices: counterpoint in the mixtures on 4 voices, above the obstinate bass.

Passacaglia is followed by a fugue whose main subject is the theme of the obstinate bass. Passacaglia is a rhetoric prototype of music-based argumentation with strong persuasive ability, without the need for text support. Music is here, richer and more expressive than any text.

In conclusion, the rhetorical structure of a *Passacaglia in C Minor* is clear and well organized. Its content is generally accepted by most analysts and musicologists.

4. Conclusions

Rejected temporarily because of its alleged superficial character, the rhetoric remained at the forefront of the music to which it belongs as an essence, namely that of the Baroque. Integrating the main rhetorical concepts into musical composition and execution is, in fact, one of the main features of the Baroque period. Each level of music was dominated by rhetoric: style, form, aesthetics, expression, and interpretation. In the centuries that followed, the rhetoric turned to a more modern vision, but remained a key element of musical composition. A revival of rhetoric took place in the 19th-20th centuries, with a new vision, in parallel with its rebirth in Linguistics, Psychology, and Philosophy.

This type of contrasting structure was reflected in the organ repertoire at the end of the romantic period. A typical example is the first part of Choral no. 3 in a minor for the organ, by C. Franck (1822-1890), in which sections in improvisational style, in a toccata character, alternate with interrogating recitatives and expressive chorales. An interesting feature with Franck is the way in which the contrasting musical elements are incorporated in the same part (fantasy, recitative, and chorale), unlike the Baroque approach, in which these elements were separated in different movements.

The symbolism of the musical elements, the importance of numbers and proportions (Aristotle conveyed the idea that music is the audible count), and the types of metaphors developed during the Baroque period are still alive today.

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