

Texture and dramaturgy in *Recitative and Chorus no. 58, from Bach's Matthäus-Passion*

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Abstract: *This paper illustrates the psychological effect intended by the composer, through variation of different quantitative and qualitative textures. Following an overview of the syntactic categories and the features of the texture, the second part showcases a biblical recitative, followed by a double chorus from the work mentioned above. This moment contains five segments, in which Bach highlights the message of the Scriptures in an original way. The two tables display a textural X-ray of the two polyphonic chorals diving into the correspondence between music and text. The conclusion supports the efficiency of using different types of texture by Bach in order to make the most of the written text.*

Keywords: *texture, polyphony, homophony*

1. Introduction

The present paper is trying to explain the psychological aspect of various musical syntactic categories within the musical speech. Such an approach to this issue could make it easier to understand the music and the composer's means of expression. The example under analysis, the recitative and chorus no. 58 from *Matthäus Passion*, reveals the expressive force achieved through the difference between the high or low density of the texture which are highly related to the message of the text standing at the foundation of the music.

2. Defining features of the musical texture.

2.1. About musical syntax

The musical syntax consists of the musical sounds, and depends on the number of voices at one specific moment, and also on the way they develop, that is, they signal

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the cases of simultaneity or sequence as well as the repetition or changing relations (Balint 2012, 1).

Monody is highlighted due to the principle of sequence, as a row of sound objects whereas homophony is based on the simultaneity one, as a row of harmonic batches of sound objects. Polyphony is founded on an overconfiguration system of at least two overlapping monodies and finally, heterophony represents the overlapping of at least two monodies swinging between two states: total dependence and total independence. (Niculescu 1980, 56).

For consistency purposes, the refinement of the main four types of syntax taxonomy would lead to a more efficient musical range, thus giving way to some other textural models:

1. The tuning texture made up of chords wherein voices are mostly in a comparatively homorhythmic relation. This refinement is indicative of the traditional definition of homophony as a texture in which a soloist is accompanied by a secondary backup line and a bass voice to counterpoint the lead voice.

2. Doubling represents an intervallic, rhythmic and directional convergence between two voices.

3. Mirroring is generally viewed as a relation between two identical melodic and rhythmic passages developing in different directions.

2.2. The texture and its role in stylistic distinction

The texture description and quality assessment is relevant in terms of understanding the styles and stylistic epochs (Berry 1987, 192). Here are some examples and their utility from the stylistic framing perspective.

- a) There is a distinction between the bass voice line in the Renaissance and the Baroque polyphonic textures. There is a high level of freedom of this line in the former and specific limitations in the latter due to the tonal logic where the bass voice is meant to support and emphasize the harmonic content.

- b) The unique texture of *the organum* has two or more interrelated lines representative for its style and its evolution from the basic level to the interlining diversification.

- c) After the absolute domination of the counterpoint and polyphony throughout the Renaissance and Baroque periods, a real revolution was brought about by monody and its specific texture.

- d) The 20th century brought in a unique texture, called *punctualism*.

- e) Affiliation of several other composers and the evolution of their style becomes visible through the assessment of the texture specific to each composer.

- f) The distinction between musical genres is the most compelling trademark based on texture varieties, for instance, the obvious textural differences between sacred music and secular music throughout the centuries, the parts of the "missa" and "chansons" by Josquin des Prés or Orlando di Lasso.

g) The texture can sometimes be the key to some dramatic evolutions within the highly resourceful forms of other elements. For instance, quite simple textures can showcase some of the most effusive and daring harmonic approaches.

2.3. The textural quantity and quality

Besides attributing a work or parts of it to a specific syntactic typology, certain parameters are to be encountered through the morphologic analysis.

Going beyond the single voice pertaining to monody, in the case of multiple voices we shall analyze the two parameters of texture, i. e. quantity and quality.

For quantity, the number of voices at a specific moment, and especially a certain density come under scrutiny. As for quality the important fact is the independence or interdependence between the voices. For example, if the voices are in unison or in alt the result is a poorer volume of sound than that of each voice singing independently (see figure 1.) (Berry 1987, 188).

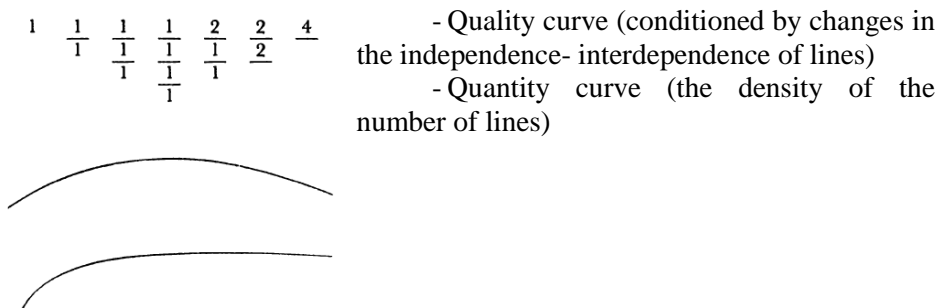


Fig. 1. *Quantity and quality progression and quality recession of texture*

When reference is made to the quality of the texture, the density is shown by the compression degree of the events in one specific place. More precisely, the relationship between density and dissonances is vital. For instance, three elements compressed into one minor third result in a severe dissonance, densitywise. (Ciobanu 2012, 15).

3. The Recitative and Chorus no. 58 from *Matthäus-Passion* – texture analysis

I have selected for the next step a few examples of musical texture from the work mentioned above. It's worth mentioning how Bach uses mixed of monodic, homophonous or polyphonic textures to achieve the intended effects.

Manfred Bukofzer offers several reasons to that effect in his paper (Bukofzer 1947, 167). Thus, Bach uses monody on the biblical text so as to leave the text

untouched. When Jesus speaks, Bach obtains a special effect by using monody accompanied by the strings. The homophony supports the meaningful chorals and the devotional message of the faithful. The poliphony, with its own imitation feature creates a dramatic surrounding effect with reference to the crowd shouting "Crucify Him!", or the false witnesses, or the priests trying to dare Him to descend from the cross, or the Roman soldiers hitting Him.

The recitative and chorus no.58 contain the biblical excerpt from Matthew chapter 27, verses 33-43. Bach separates it into five sections in the following order recitative – chorus – recitative – chorus – recitative.

The first 27-bar *secco* recitative illustrates the Evangelist's remark by means of a simple monody, at times marked by *continuo*, as harmonic support (see figure 5).

The image shows a musical score for the first recitative of the Evangelist. It is labeled '67 RECITATIVO. Coro I.' and 'Evangelist.' The score is in G major and 3/4 time. The Evangelist's part is a simple monody. The Organo e Continuo part provides harmonic support. The Evangelist's part has the following lyrics: 'Und da sie an die Stät-to ka-men, mit Na-men Gol-ga-tha, das ist ver-deut-schet, Schädel-stätt, gaben sie ihm Es-sig zu trin-ken mit. Gal-len ver-'

Fig. 5. *The Evangelist first recitative*

The first recitative is followed by a section of double 13-bar chorus presenting the mocking crowd hinting to Jesus's previous statement that He had the power to rebuild the Temple, that is His own body, which would be resurrected in three days. Bach masterly renders the text through a polyphonic-imitative texture, both between the two choruses and within each one of them. Figure no. 6 shows following: the first four bars consist of an homophonic section each chorus, on the text *You, who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days*. A *fugatto* imitation bestows a special effect, the first chorus entering a canon within a bar from the second chorus. Here we have a mixed texture of polyphony of homophonies.

The image displays a musical score for the first double chorus in fugatto. The score is divided into two systems. The first system includes parts for Flauto traverso I.II., Oboe I and Violino I, Oboe II and Violino II, Viola, Soprano, Alto, Tenore, Basso, and Organo e Continuo. The second system includes parts for Flauto traverso I.II., Oboe I and Violino I, Oboe II and Violino II, Viola, Soprano, Alto, Tenore, Basso, and Organo e Continuo. The lyrics for the vocal parts are: "Der du den Tem-pel Gottes zer- brichst, und bau - - - est". The score features various musical notations, including clefs, key signatures, and time signatures. There are also some markings like "zu 2" and "8" above certain notes.

Fig. 6. *First double chorus in fugatto*

Starting with bar no.4, the texture is suddenly reduced by recession. A progression follows, starting with one instrumentally doubled voice up until bar no. 6 when the four-voice chorus is resumed alongside instruments and continuo on the text *Save Yourself if indeed You are the Son of God, descend from the cross.*

Interestingly enough, this last word, *cross*, comes just in the end to underlie the climax following the imitative progress on the text *Let Him descend*, in the form of a *perpetuum mobile*, for an unparalleled psycho-emotional effect: the pressure of the crowd on Jesus to forsake the plan for redemption and descend from cross.

The first chorus is one bar behind, but in bar no. 7 it joins the second chorus sharing the same sound material. Up until here there is a small scale polyphony of polyphonies with a larger density of increasing texture quality, not quantity. Until bar no. 13 polyphony is kept for each chorus only, leading to a recession in volume of sound despite the maximum number of voices. Here the distinction is made by the degree of independence or interdependence between the lines, as well as by the acoustic concentration due to the polyphonic overlapping two choruses (see table 1).

BAR	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1Chorus													
No. Of voices	-	9	9	9	3/5	7	8	9	9	9	9	9	9
Sonorities	-	4	4	4	2/3	4	5	4	4	4	4	4	4
Syntax		homophony			poliphony								
2Chorus													
No. Of voices	9	9	9	3/5	7	8	9	9	9	9	9	9	9
Sonorities	4	4	4	2/3	4	5	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
Syntax	homophony			poliphony									
Syntax between choruses	poliphony of homophonies			Poliphony of poliphonies									

Table 1. *First chorus-textural layout*

The third section has just three bars with a very simple low-density texture, where Matthew brings the news that both the priests and the elders had joined the mocking crowd. It is a specific monodic texture (see figure 7).

RECITATIVO. Coro I.

Evangelist. 8

Organo e Continuo.

Des - glei - chen auch die Ho - hen - prie - ster spot - te - ten

Fig. 7. *The second recitative*

The fourth section brings back the polyphonic texture, and it comprises 20 bars. The first text *He saved others but He cannot save Himself*, comes here in *stretto* between both choruses, on the first three bars, and in a homophonous script for each chorus so as to emphasize the text. After a general break of one quarter, in bar no. 3, two voices start an imitative motive on the text *If He is King of Israel, let Him descend from the cross, and we shall believe in Him*. This time both choruses overlap to amplify sonority. The polyphonic texture inside each chorus is increasing both in quantity, through gradually adding voices, and in quality, through increased sonorities. The biblical text mentioned before showcases the obsession of crowd, together with the priests, to persuade Jesus to come down from the cross.

The homophonous fragment from bar 11 to 14 has a special impact leading to a depression of texture, with sonorities reminding of the atmosphere of protestant chorals. It is here that the text binds two verses: first *We shall believe in Him* as universal acknowledgement of the belief in Jesus, even by His enemies. The second verse on the text *He trusts in God*, marks the unshaken trust of The Saviour in His Father. Here the composer's own belief comes through through his emotional involvement in the whole musical unfolding. Starting from bar 14 until bar 16, the imitative polyphony is brought back, on the text *Let God rescue Him now*. The progression highlights the dynamics, and the increasing tension calls for God's intervention.

The final fragment brings back again the homophonous clarity on the last four bars, on the text *If (God) loves wants Him, for He said He was the Son of God*. The final climax of all voices joined together is noteworthy. Bach does not go for the climax on the highest textural density, but on a low quality one, thus highlighting the sound intensity. Bach intended to underscore the tragic moment both through the unison and the minor without the Picardy third from the end as well as by means of the one-way descending voices. It's remarkable how this unison joined in by the His persecutors highlight the universal acknowledgement of Jesus as the Son of God (see the table 2).

The whole section ends in the return of the Evangelist's recitative.

4. Conclusions

The musical texture proves yet again to have an essential role in the evolution of musical dramaturgy. As John Butt suggests in his book (Butt 2010, 97), Bach succeeds in making the most of the scriptural text by using diverse textures subject to the evolution of dramaturgy.

Once more, Bach takes on the role of mediator in order to make the most of the sacred text through music, for the benefit of his audience, thus reaching the peak of Baroque musical rhetoric (Swain 2006, 15).

BAR	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
1Chorus																				
No. of voices	- /9	9	4	6/8	9	8	8	9	9	9	9	9	9	4/6	8	9	9	9	9	9
Sonorities	- /4	4	1	3/4	5	4	4	4	4	5	4	4	4	3/4	4	4	4	4	4	1
Syntax	homo- phony	poliphony									homophony			poliphony						m*
2Chorus																				
No. of voices	9	9	4	6/8	9	8	8	9	9	9	9	9	9	4/6	8	9	9	9	9	9
Sonorities	4	4	1	3/4	5	4	4	4	4	5	4	4	4	3/4	4	4	4	4	4	1
Syntax	homophony	poliphony									homophony			poliphony						m*
Syntax between chorus 1 and 2	Poliphony of homophony		Double polyphony																*monody	m*

Table 2. *The second chorus – textural layout*

5. References

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