

# American Choral Review

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With this issue of the *American Choral Review*, I am pleased to announce a transition for the *Review* from Chorus America to a new home with the National Collegiate Choral Organization, published under the masthead of *The Choral Scholar*, and the current Editor-in-Chief, Mark Nabholz. The journal has been published by Chorus America since its inception under the American Choral Foundation, having been founded by Alfred Mann in 1961. William Weinert assumed editorship of the journal in 1999, followed by James John in 2011, and myself in 2017. For several years, the ACR expanded to nearly book-length until its present form was adopted in 1991 for practical reasons. NCCO plans to incorporate the title in their masthead as *The Choral Scholar & American Choral Review* with a spring and fall issue each calendar year. The ACR archives will be made available digitally through the NCCO website. The archives will be indexed and searchable to maximize usefulness for research and general study.

This valedictory Chorus America issue features a study of Bach's use rhetorical devices in *Cantata Ich hatte viel Bekümmernis*, BWV 21 in light of Johann Mattheson's criticism of Bach's compositional practices. Author Anna Lenti believes that knowledge of these devices by the conductor will create compelling performances. Laura Lynch and Michael Allen Anderson have contributed an fascinating interview with countertenor Geoffrey Williams and baritone Christopher Dylan Herbert of the internationally-acclaimed quartet, New York Polyphony, in which the two describe the inception, artistic and business decisions, and trajectory of becoming a leading early music group in modern times.

Timothy Newton, editor

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## Bach's Rhetorical Intuition: A Response to Mattheson's Criticism of *Ich hatte viel Bekümmernis*

ANNA LENTI

In 1725, the well-known German composer, theorist, and critic Johann Mattheson published a scathing review of Bach's Cantata 21, *Ich hatte viel Bekümmernis*, for its misuse of rhetorical devices. In particular, Mattheson criticized and even mocked Bach's repetition in the opening movement. Alleging that Bach "does nothing but repeat,"<sup>1</sup> he listed the words to this movement without their musical context, as if in ridicule: *Ich, ich, ich. Ich hatte viel Bekümmernis. Ich hatte viel Bekümmernis. In meinem Herzen,*

*in meinem Herzen, in meinem Herzen, etc.* Mattheson was familiar with more of Bach's works and did not roundly criticize those.<sup>2</sup> This critique then seems especially strange given the value that Mattheson himself placed upon repetition in rhetorical gestures in many of his publications. This paper will explore the various ways in which BWV 21 demonstrates Bach's mastery of the very rhetorical devices that Mattheson himself promoted, and how conductors can use their knowledge of these rhetorical devices to help create

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<sup>1</sup>George Buelow and Hans Joachim Marx, *New Mattheson Studies*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 363.

<sup>2</sup>Buelow and Marx, 363.

compelling performances. Specifically, it will examine three compositional tools: the overall structure of the work, Bach's choice of key signature and/or tonal areas, and specific rhetorical musical gestures that appear within the work.



Johann Mattheson

Mattheson (1681-1764), was a prominent figure in codifying the art of composition in the eighteenth century. An accomplished organist, composer, and singer, Mattheson was an almost exact contemporary of Bach. Today, his artistic output is largely overshadowed by his writings, which offer extensive commentary on the art of composition, detailed directives on effective musical instruction, periodicals of musical performances and publications, and biographical profiles of his musical contemporaries.<sup>3</sup>

Mattheson was connected to a number of the leading composers of his time, including Handel, with whom he had a close working relationship. Mattheson mentioned Bach for the first time in print in 1713, referring to him as “the famous Weimar organist,” and requesting biographical information for one of his publications. Bach sadly declined, even after follow-up requests.<sup>4</sup> In Mattheson's subsequent writings, he refers to, or critiques Bach's works close to a dozen times, including his review of BWV 21, which appears in a volume of his periodical, *Critica Musica*.<sup>5</sup>

BWV 21 is a work that Bach continually revisited and revised throughout the early eighteenth century. Its origins are largely ambiguous, but the first, well-documented performance took place in Weimar for the Third Sunday after Trinity in 1714.<sup>6</sup> Some evidence suggests that it may have been performed in a reduced version much earlier than this, perhaps conceived originally as a duet cantata for bass and soprano.<sup>7</sup> After 1714, Bach revived the work for performance at least twice, during his Cöthen period and then again in Leipzig in 1723. The version presented in Leipzig included a redistribution of vocal solos, expanded instrumentation, and the full eleven movements as they are performed today.

Mattheson's familiarity with BWV 21 may have originated from attendance at a live performance of the work in Hamburg in 1720. There is strong evidence to suggest that Bach performed this cantata as part of his audition for the post of organist in Hamburg that year. Mattheson's presence in Hamburg at the time, combined with his subsequent critique of the work, was enough for Philipp Spitta to be the first to suggest Mattheson's likely attendance at the performance.<sup>8</sup> However, it is also possible that Mattheson simply obtained a physical copy of the score, and based his critique on visual study alone. It is therefore difficult to know with which completed version he was most familiar, but for the sake of this article, I will examine the fully expanded Leipzig version.<sup>9</sup> Certainly, Bach's constant revision of the cantata through the years suggests that he strove for improvements in the rhetorical impact of the piece, and these should be acknowledged.

Table one (*beginning on the next page*) provides the structure of the cantata.

<sup>3</sup>George J Buelow, “Mattheson, Johann,” *Grove Music Online*, 2001.

<sup>4</sup>Buelow

<sup>5</sup>New Mattheson Studies, 357

<sup>6</sup>Alfred Dürr, *The Cantatas of J.S. Bach: With their Librettos in German-English Parallel Text*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 409.

<sup>7</sup>According to Alfred Dürr, a no longer verifiable source suggests that Bach may have used a reduced version of this piece as an audition for the organist post in Halle in 1713. Dürr leaves this possibility open.

<sup>8</sup>Buelow and Marx, 358.

<sup>9</sup>Conductors will find useful and practical information for all of Bach's cantatas in Alfred Dürr's *The Cantatas of J.S. Bach*, including a brief summary of the work's history and a poetic translation of each movement. For more practical and historical knowledge of performance practice considerations, see Joshua Rifkin, “From Weimar to Leipzig: Concertists and Ripienists in Bach's ‘Ich Hatte Viel Bekümmernis’,” *Early Music* 24, no. 4 (1996): 583-603. For a theological perspective, see Eric Chafe, *Tears into Wine: J. S. Bach's Cantata 21 in Musical and Theological Context*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

**Table 1. BWV 21 Features, Texts, and Translations<sup>10</sup>**

<b>Movement</b>	<b>Instrumentation</b>	<b>Key</b>	<b>Text</b>	<b>Translation</b>
1. Sinfonia	Oboe obbligato, strings, continuo	Cm	None	None
2. Chorus	Oboe, strings, bassoon, continuo	Cm	Ich hatte viel Bekümmernis in meinem Herzen; aber deine Tröstungen erquicken meine Seele.	I had much grief in my heart; But your consolations revive my soul.
3. Soprano aria	Oboe obbligato, continuo	Cm	Seufzer, Tränen, Kummer, Not, Ängstlich Sehnen, Furcht und Tod Nagen mein beklemmtes Herz, Ich empfinde Jammer, Schmerz.	Sighs, tears, grief, distress, Anxious yearning, fear and death Gnaw at my heavy heart, I feel misery, sorrow.
4. Tenor recit	Accompagnato strings, continuo	Cm	Wie hast du dich, mein Gott, In meiner Not, In meiner Furcht und Zagen Denn ganz von mir gewandt? Ach! kennst du nicht dein Kind? Ach! hörst du nicht das Klagen Von denen, die dir sind Mit Bund und Treu verwandt? Da warest meine Lust Und bist mir grausam worden; Ich suche dich an allen Orten, Ich ruf und schrei dir nach, Allein mein Weh und Ach! Scheint itzt, als sei es dir ganz unbewußt	Why, then, my God, In my distress, In my fear and dismay, Have You quite turned away from me? Ah! do You not know Your child? Ah! do You not hear the lamentation Of those who are linked to You By covenant and faithfulness? You were my delight And have become cruel to me; I seek You on all sides; I call and cry to You; However, my woe and lament seem Now as if You were quite unaware of them.
5. Tenor aria	Strings, bassoon, continuo	Fm	Bäche von gesalznen Zähren, Fluten rauschen stets einher. Sturm und Wellen mich versehren, Und dies trübsalvolle Meer Will mir Geist und Leben schwächen, Mast und Anker wollen brechen, Hier versink ich in den Grund, Dort seh ins der Hölle Schlund.	Streams of salty tears, Floods rush along continually. Storm and waves destroy me, And this sea full of tribulation Would weaken my spirit and life, Mast and anchor would break; Here I sink into the ground, There I look into the jaws of hell.
6. Chorus	Oboe, strings, bassoon, continuo	Fm/ Cm	Was betrübst du dich, meine Seele, und bist so unruhig in mir? Harre auf Gott; denn ich werde ihm noch danken, daß er meines Angesichtes Hilfe und mein Gott ist.	Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you so disquieted within me? Wait upon God! For I shall yet thank Him for being the help of my countenance and my God.
7. Soprano and bass recit	String accompagnato, continuo	B♭M	<i>Seele</i> Ach Jesu, meine Ruh, Mein Licht, wo bleibest du? <i>Jesus</i> O Seele, sieh! Ich bin bei dir. <i>Seele</i> Bei mir? Hier ist ja lauter Nacht. <i>Jesus</i> Ich bin dein treuer Freund, Der auch im Dunkeln wacht, Wo lauter Schalken seind. <i>Seele</i> Brich doch mit deinem Glanz und Licht des Trostes ein! <i>Jesus</i> Die Stunde kömmet schon, Da deines Kampfes Kron Dir wird ein süßes Labsal sein.	<i>Soul</i> Ah Jesus, my repose, My light, where are you? <i>Jesus</i> O soul, see! I am with you. <i>Soul</i> With me? Here is indeed nothing but night. <i>Jesus</i> I am your faithful Friend Who watches over you even in darkness, Where plain rascals are. <i>Soul</i> Break in, then, with the radiance and light of Your comfort! <i>Jesus</i> The hour already arrives When your strife's crown Shall be a sweet refreshment for you.

<sup>10</sup>Translation from: Alfred Dürr, 405-408.

<b>Movement</b>	<b>Instrumentation</b>	<b>Key</b>	<b>Text</b>	<b>Translation</b>
8. Soprano and bass duet	Continuo	B♭M	<p><i>Seele</i> <i>Jesus</i> Komm, mein Jesu, und erquicke Ja, ich komme und erquicke Und erfreu mit deinem Blicke! Dich mit meinem Gnadenblicke. Diese Seele, Deine Seele, Die soll sterben Die soll leben Und nicht leben Und nicht sterben, Und in ihrer Unglückshöhle Hier aus dieser Wundenhöhle Ganz verderben. Sollt du erben Ich muß stets in Kummer schweben, Heil durch diesen Saft der Reben. Ja, ach ja, ich bin verloren, Nein, ach nein, du bist erkoren, Nein, ach nein, du hassest mich. Ja, ach ja, ich liebe dich. Ach, Jesu, durchsüße mir Seele und Herze! Entweichet, ihr Sorgen, verschwinde, du Schmerze! Komm, mein Jesu, und erquicke Ja, ich komme und erquicke Mich mit deinem Gnadenblicke. Dich mit meinem Gnadenblicke.</p>	<p><i>Soul</i> <i>Jesus</i> Come, my Jesus, and replenish me Yes, I come and replenish you And delight me with Your glance! With My gracious glance. This soul Your soul Shall die Shall live And not live And not die; And in its cavern of misfortune Here from this cavern of wounds Completely perish. You shall inherit I must constantly hover in affliction; Salvation from this juice of vines. Yes, ah yes, I am lost, No, ah no, you have been chosen, No, ah no, You hate me. Yes, ah yes, I love you. Ah, Jesus, sweeten my soul and heart! Depart, you cares; vanish, you pains! Come, my Jesus, and replenish Yes, I come and replenish Me with Your gracious glance. You with My gracious glance.</p>
9. Chorus	Oboe, strings, continuo, bassoon, trombones	Gm	<p>Sei nun wieder zufrieden, meine Seele, denn der Herr tut dir Guts. Was helfen uns die schweren Sorgen, Was hilft uns unser Weh und Ach? Was hilft es, daß wir alle Morgen Beseufzen unser Ungemach? Wir machen unser Kreuz und Leid Nur größer durch die Traurigkeit. Denk nicht in deiner Drangsalhitze, Daß du von Gott verlassen seist, Und daß Gott der im Schoße sitze, Der sich mit stetem Glücke speist. Die folgend Zeit verändert viel Und setzet jeglichem sein Ziel.</p>	<p>'Now be content once more, my soul, for the Lord does you good.' What good are heavy cares? What good are our woes and laments? What good is it that every morning We bemoan our affliction? We make our cross-bearing and suffering But greater through sorrow. Think not in the the heat of your ordeal That you are forsaken by God And that God places in His bosom Him who feeds on constant good fortune. The coming time will alter much And appoint to each his goal.</p>
10. Tenor olo	Cello obbligato, continuo	FM	<p>Erfreue dich, Seele, erfreue dich, Herze, Entweiche nun, Kummer, verschwinde, du Schmerze! Verwandle dich, Weinen, in lauterem Wein, Es wird nun mein Ächzen ein Jauchzen mir sein! Es brennet und flammet die reineste Kerze Der Liebe, des Trostes in Seele und Brust, Weil Jesus mich tröstet mit himmlischer Lust.</p>	<p>Rejoice, O soul; rejoice, O heart; Depart now, grief; vanish sorrow! Transform yourself, whining, into pure wine! My moaning will now become a singing to me. There now burns and flames the purest candle Of love, of comfort in my soul and breast, For Jesus consoles me with heavenly delight.</p>
11. Chorus	Trumpets, timpani, oboe, strings, bassoon, continuo	CM	<p>Das Lamm, das erwürget ist, ist würdig zu nehmen Kraft und Reichtum und Weisheit und Stärke und Ehre und Preis und Lob. Lob und Ehre und Preis und Gewalt sei unserm Gott von Ewigkeit zu Ewigkeit. Amen, Alleluja!</p>	<p>The Lamb, that was slain, is worthy to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and praise and glory. Glory and honor and praise and power be to our God from eternity to eternity. Amen, alleluia!</p>

It is not exactly clear how rhetoric and musical composition became intertwined so strongly in Germany, but perhaps it has to do with how well the two resonated with the doctrines of Lutheranism. Luther's emphasis upon the power of the written word is evident in his insistence upon the vernacular, his translation of the Bible, and even his own composition of homophonic, syllabic chorales. Luther's belief that the written word is the key to revelation, education, and ultimately salvation, reflects the overall influence of humanism on Protestant thought.<sup>11</sup> If music can be a natural extension, and even elevation, of the power of the written word, then rhetorical principles should apply to both art forms.

This connection between music and rhetoric became most clearly defined in seventeenth-century Germany, where there was a "systematic development of a secondary 'musical rhetoric' corresponding to the contemporary linguistic rhetorical discipline."<sup>12</sup> Mattheson was foremost in his publication of detailing specific rhetorical musical figures and devices, particularly ones that could elicit affective responses from listeners.<sup>13</sup> He even related the process of writing a speech to composing a piece, enumerating the steps that a composer could follow to create a rhetorically admirable work.<sup>14</sup>

The study of rhetoric would have been central to the education of nearly all the German composers of

Bach's generation.<sup>15</sup> However, Bach's codified study in this area was limited in comparison to that of his peers. While Telemann, Mattheson, and even Bach's own sons gained training in rhetoric at the university level, Bach's only official exposure to this curriculum was during his teenage years at St. Michael's School in Lüneburg.<sup>16</sup> Perhaps it was out of insecurity in his own training that he declined to teach both Latin and rhetoric at the Thomasschule.<sup>17</sup>

Nevertheless, Bach's rhetorical prowess was noted and appreciated by other contemporaries. For example, when Johann Adolf Scheibe famously criticized Bach's compositional style, a noted professor of rhetoric at Leipzig, Johann Abraham Birnbaum, came to his strong defense.<sup>18</sup> The practice of persuasive and affective composition was something that Bach could have simply absorbed through his exposure to accomplished orators and composers alike. The evidence of his extensive rhetorical knowledge, intuitive or otherwise, is apparent in how closely BWV 21 adheres to Mattheson's own guidelines.

In his *Der vollkommene Capellmeister*, Mattheson lists the structure of a classical oration as it can be applied to musical composition, dividing the process into six parts, enumerated in the chart below: *exordium*, *narratio*, *partitio*, *confirmatio*, *confutatio*, and *conclusio*.<sup>19</sup>

**Table 2. The Structure of a Classical Oration**

Part		Purpose
Exordium	Introduction	To conciliate the audience
Narratio	Statement of Facts	To instruct the audience
Divisio or Partitio	Division	Enumerates the points to come which the author should hold in his mind
Confirmatio	Proof	To confirm our own propositions
Confutatio or Reprehensio	Refutation	To overthrow arguments
Conclusio	Peroration	To refresh the memory and appeal to the emotions of the audience

Reproduced from Judy Tarling, *The Weapons of Rhetoric: A Guide for Musicians and Audiences*, (St. Albans: Corda Music, 2004), 153.

<sup>11</sup>Bartel, 58.

<sup>12</sup>Dietrich Bartel, *Musica Poetica: Musical-Rhetorical Figures in German Baroque Music*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 57.

<sup>13</sup>Known as *Affektenlehre*, this idea was explored by German theorists in the Baroque, and was cultivated by the composers they influenced. The theory proposed that, just as orators can influence their audience through rhetorical rules and devices, so too could composers move the emotions (or 'affects') of their listeners. The term refers not to a single theory, but to the prevailing ideas that permeated the writings of many theorists, including Mattheson.

George J. Buelow, "Affects, theory of the," *Grove Music Online*, 2001

<sup>14</sup>Johann Mattheson and Ernest Charles Harriss, *Johann Mattheson's Der Vollkommene Capellmeister: A Translation and Commentary*, (DMA diss., Peabody College for Teachers of Vanderbilt University, 1969), 753.

<sup>15</sup>Bartel, 65

<sup>16</sup>Bruce Haynes and Geoffrey Burgess, *The Pathetic Musician: Moving an Audience in the Age of Eloquence*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 24.

<sup>17</sup>Haynes and Burgess, 24.

<sup>18</sup>Haynes and Burgess, 25.

<sup>19</sup>Mattheson and Harriss, 752.

The opening introduction, known as the *exordium*, prepares the listener for what is to come, hinting at its emotional content without any substantial development.<sup>20</sup> After the *narratio*, which states the facts clearly and plainly,<sup>21</sup> the middle sections present the various arguments for and against. In the *conclusio*, the author is finally encouraged to appeal to the emotions of the audience with abandon, wrapping up the work with full emotional flair on display.

While Mattheson acknowledges that many composers and orators alike would have had no specific knowledge of these rhetorical suggestions, this general structure is nonetheless present in most “good speeches as well as good melodies,” and is therefore worth defining as a deliberate technique of composition.<sup>22</sup>

Although Cantata 21 existed in a number of different forms, the final structure of the cantata mirrors classical oration unusually closely. The narrative offers a depiction of the faithful’s journey from despair to redemption. Ultimate distress in the first three movements is followed by the full powers of hell in the tenor aria and recitative (nos. 4 and 5). The chorus (no. 6) calls upon God for help, and Jesus answers in the subsequent duets for soprano and bass (nos. 7 and 8). A solo movement for tenor brings joy in the understanding of Christ’s ability to be present, even in suffering. Finally, a jubilant chorus concludes the work with an exuberant song of praise (no. 11).<sup>23</sup>

Every completed version of the cantata contains at least the second, sixth, and ninth movements—all, notably, are choruses. One can see the overall rhetorical structure of the work as centering around these three movements: no. 2 functions as the *exordium* and the beginning of the *narratio*; no. 6 is the presentation of the major arguments, beginning as the continuation of the *narratio*, and then moving on to the *divisio* and *confutatio*; and finally, no. 9 serves as the *conclusio*. In its final form with all of the movements present, the structure of the classical oration emerges in its most polished and logical form. Each movement, or pair of movements, represents a portion of the classical oration, drawing the listener into the argument and engaging their emotions with the music.

In the final version of BWV 21, one can see the opening *Sinfonia* as the true *exordium*, as it draws the listener into the somber emotion of the piece through the choice of key (C minor), tempo marking (*adagio assai*), and scoring (strings with oboe obbligato). Prevalent in a number of Bach’s more poignant works, the oboe is described by 17th-century scholars as “suitable for the expression of soft, tender, and...sad feelings.”<sup>24</sup> It therefore seems fitting that this would be Bach’s instrument of choice for the *exordium*.

The *Sinfonia* is followed by the chorus *Ich hatte viel Bekümmernis* (no. 2), which can be viewed as both a continuation of the *exordium* and a transition into the *narratio*, or the statement of facts. A deeply personal plea from the chorus, emphasized by the thrice-repeated ‘*ich*’ of which Mattheson complained, draws the listener into a place of deep sorrow and longing. After repeating just this first word three times, the phrase finally continues with an imitative section setting the full opening sentence, “*Ich hatte viel Bekümmernis in meinem Herzen*” (I had much grief in my heart). A startling moment of silence in the middle of the movement, at the word “*aber*,” is followed by a complete change in affect as the chorus sings the text, “*deine Tröstungen erquickken meine Seele*” (your consolations revive my soul). This dichotomy between the first and second halves of the movement serves as a complete presentation of the facts of the story: the narrator is plagued with sorrow but also longs for salvation from this sorrow through Jesus’s redemption. Conductors of this work should keep these structural components at the forefront of their minds when making decisions regarding tempo, pacing, and especially transitions in these opening movements. Each subsection of the music communicates its own message, and therefore requires its own affect. For example, a slightly quicker tempo for the second movement than the first would suit the change from emotional plea to statement of fact.

Bach’s choice of key is also rhetorically significant to these opening movements.<sup>25</sup> Because temperaments used in the Baroque period created starker differences between keys than we are normally accustomed, Baroque theorists considered the choice of key to be one

<sup>20</sup>Judy Tarling, *The Weapons of Rhetoric: A Guide for Musicians and Audiences*, (St. Albans: Corda Music, 2004), 159.

<sup>21</sup>Tarling, 161.

<sup>22</sup>Tarling, 161.

<sup>23</sup>Alfred Dürr, 409.

<sup>24</sup>Josef Marx, “The Tone of the Baroque Oboe: An Interpretation of the History of Double-Reed Instruments,” *The Galpin Society Journal* 4 (1951): 3

<sup>25</sup>The discussion of key signatures and tonal areas in this work comes with a caveat. Certainly, our modern concept of tonality differs greatly from Bach and his contemporaries, who were often working in a more modal context. The key signatures in this work are a prime example of this dichotomy. For example, the key signature for movements in “C minor” only contain two flats, which in a modern context would signify G minor. Even so, the harmonic context clearly indicates a tonal center around C. Given that Mattheson himself refers to minor keys in his writings, I shall continue to use this vocabulary in our discussion of key.

that could enhance rhetorical power. Mattheson himself devoted an entire chapter of his *Das neu-eröffnete Orchestre* to key areas and their particular affects.<sup>26</sup> Though these affects were not uniformly recognized from region to region, one can see consistent trends in composers' use of specific keys. In performances of Baroque works, this essential aspect of rhetorical language is often lost due to the use of equal temperament. Certainly, these characteristics could easily be recaptured if the keyboard in particular is sensitively tuned in an appropriate Baroque temperament.<sup>27</sup>

C minor is the prevailing tonal center for the first four movements of this cantata, including this opening *exordium* and *narratio*. Of this key, Mattheson says it "possesses both exceeding loveliness and, at the same time, sadness."<sup>28</sup> Rather than choosing a harsher key, like F-sharp minor, or a more tender one, like A minor, Bach chooses the middle ground of C minor. It reflects sadness and melancholy couched in loveliness, helping the listener to remain connected to the promise of Christ's comfort amidst any suffering. (See Figure 2, next page.)

Mattheson's rhetorical critique of this cantata focused specifically on the opening choral movement and its use of repetition. Though he does not take the time to specify exactly what about Bach's compositional process he would change, it is clear that the treatment of the text at its outset bothered him the most. However, throughout the entire first movement, Bach utilizes many of the rhetorical figures specified in Mattheson's own writings.

A musical-rhetorical figure is "an artful and expressive musical device which digressed from either the simple, unadorned musical idiom or the established rules of counterpoint."<sup>29</sup> Some authors of treatises about rhetoric treated these figures as options from which a composer could pick and choose with intention; others saw these musical gestures as figures that had simply taken on a certain meaning over time through their repeated use. For example, a descending minor second was easily qualified as a lamenting or sorrowful gesture. One could either see this figure as a tool that composers utilized deliberately at moments of sorrow in the music, or alternatively as something that was simply part of the idiomatic musical language of the time. In either case, authors

including Mattheson sought to catalogue these various gestures and assigned meanings to assist composers in their efforts.

Bach repeatedly deploys two types of rhetorical figures throughout the opening movement: gestures of repetition and gestures of silence. Mattheson specifically attacked the repetition Bach chose for the opening text, "*Ich hatte viel Bekümmernis in meinem Herze.*" Bach repeats the first word three times, and each repetition is punctuated with an echoing chord from the orchestra. Mattheson categorized this type of repetition as *epizeuxis*, or an "emphatic" repetition of a word or phrase.<sup>30</sup> It is one of the most commonly used gestures, bringing emphasis to the chosen text. It appears that Bach's intention was to emphasize the intensely personal nature of the text, choosing to repeat the word "ich" before he even allows the congregation to hear the full context of the sentence. A conductor's choice of contrasting dynamics for each of these utterances could easily bring this intention to life.

This opening *epizeuxis* (immediate repetition of a word) is followed by a contrapuntal section, the choral voices layered in offset entrances. Each time the opening words are repeated twice, producing the phrase "*Ich hatte viel Bekümmernis, ich hatte viel Bekümmernis in meinem Herzen.*" This phrase is then repeated in imitation among all the voices, creating a double layer of repetition. Because this is the opening musical and textual phrase of the work, the best corresponding rhetorical gesture is known as *anaphora*, which is specifically the repetition of an opening phrase in consecutive passages. As this repetition continues for a full thirty-seven measures, it could also be considered *epanalepsis*, which is a frequent repetition of a musical phrase. *Epizeuxis*, *anaphora*, and *epanalepsis* are all mentioned by Mattheson in his catalogue of rhetorical figures of repetition. A nuanced performance of this opening movement should take into account this vast number of repetitions, varying each logically in dynamic and affect.

Also notable in these opening movements is Bach's use of gestures of silence. He begins this even as early as the opening *Sinfonia* with the appearance of three fermatas at mm. 16, 17 and 19. Though the fermatas do not necessarily imply complete silence, they certainly halt the momentum of the phrase unexpectedly each

<sup>26</sup>Johann Mattheson and Hans Lenneberg, "Johann Mattheson on Affect and Rhetoric in Music (II)," *Journal of Music Theory* 2, no. 2 (1958): 234.

<sup>27</sup>The Neidhardt "village" temperament would be one tuning option with which Bach himself was certainly familiar. Mark Lindley's article, *J.S. Bach's Tunings*, gives a good overview of the possibility of this preference. For greater consideration, Owen Jorgensen's published works are comprehensive.

Mark Lindley, "J. S. Bach's Tunings," *The Musical Times* 126, no. 1714 (1985): 721-26.

<sup>28</sup>Mattheson and Lenneberg, 235.

<sup>29</sup>Bartel, 84.

<sup>30</sup>All references to figures are found in Bartel's appendix, 444-47.

Figure 2. Figures of Repetition in No. 2 Chorus, mm. 1-52

2. Chorus

Oboe

Violino I

Violino II

Viola

Soprano  
Ich, ich, ich, ich hat - te viel Be - küm - mer - nis, ich hat - te viel Be -

Alto  
Ich, ich, ich,

Tenore  
Ich, ich, ich, ich hat - te viel Be - küm - mer - nis, ich

Basso  
Ich, ich, ich,

Fagotto

Violoncello  
Violone  
Organo (bez.)

küm - mer - nis in mei - nem Her - zen, in mei - nem  
ich hat - te viel Be -  
hat - te viel Be - küm - mer - nis in mei - nem Her -  
ich

All excerpts from the score from Johann Sebastian Bach, Ich Hatte Viel Bekümmernis: Kantate Zum 3. Sonntag Nach Trinitatis und für alle Zeit, Kassel: Bärenreiter Verlag, 1981. Used by permission



time. Mattheson described this musical gesture as *abruptio*, or a “sudden or unexpected break in the musical line”. The second fermata at m. 16 is particularly abrupt due to the sudden avoidance of the expected cadence. This could also be considered *synecdoche*, which is an “abrupt interruption in the music that coincides with the avoidance of an expected consonant harmony.” This moment requires sensitive decision-making from the conductor. To enhance the moment of surprise, the music should at first continue on as if in anticipation of the cadence, but instead of relaxing into a resolution, it might be effective to forcefully crash into the fermata. (See Figure 3, previous page.)

The gestures of silence continue in the opening chorus (no. 2). In the first measure, the aforementioned repetition of the word “*ich*” is punctuated by rests in the choral and instrumental parts. These rests feel particularly expressive, notably at the moment of the Phrygian cadence between the second and third “*ich*.” Because of the contour of the melodic line, it almost feels like a sigh, punctuated by rests, invoking the *suspiratio*, or notation of a sigh utilizing a rest. The most striking moment of silence in the opening of no. 2 occurs at m. 37, directly after the same Phrygian cadence as in the opening phrase. Two empty, long beats

are followed by an *adagio* tempo indication and the word “*aber*.” Bach then launches swiftly into the contrasting text, “*Deine tröstungen erquickten meine Seele*” (Your consolations revive my soul). The two beats of rest are particularly notable because both the orchestra and the chorus remain silent. This is the first moment of total silence since the start of the movement, and after the intense layering and repetition, it feels empty and abrupt. Such a silence fits the description of *homoioteuten*, which is a pause in all voices specifically after a cadence. The conductor should allow for the sound to die away completely in this pause before continuing on to the next section, giving clarity and nuance to this moment of complete change in affect. (See Figure 4.)

After these opening movements, the structure of the classical oration continues with various contributions to the main argument. Authors of treatises on rhetoric spend very little time discussing the middle sections of an oration (*narratio*, *divisio*, *confirmatio*, and *confutatio*),<sup>33</sup> reinforcing that the most important moments of a speech are the beginning and the end. Orators—and by association, composers—are therefore given the most freedom in the middle, where they can explore the various arguments to whatever degree necessary.

Figure 4: *Homoioteuten*, No. 1 Sinfonia, mm. 36-38

The musical score for Figure 4 consists of seven staves. The top staff is the vocal line with German lyrics. The second staff is the alto line. The third staff is the tenor line. The fourth staff is the bass line. The fifth staff is the basso continuo line with figured bass notation. The sixth and seventh staves are the keyboard accompaniment. The tempo is marked *Adagio*. The key signature is one flat (B-flat). The score shows measures 36, 37, and 38. Measure 36 starts with a Phrygian cadence. Measure 37 has a full rest for two beats. Measure 38 begins with the word "Adagio" and the text "a - ber".

<sup>33</sup>Tarling, 161.

Figure 5. No. 6 Chorus, mm. 1-4

6. Chorus  
Adagio

Oboe

Violino I

Violino II

Viola

Soprano  
solo  
Was be - trübst du dich, mei - ne See - - le,

Alto  
solo  
Was be - trübst du dich, mei - ne See - - le,

Tenore  
solo  
Was be - trübst du dich, mei - ne See - - le,

Basso  
solo  
Was be - trübst du dich, mei - ne See - - le,

Fagotto

Violoncello  
Violone  
Organo (bez.)

In this middle section of an oration, the *confirmatio* offers proof of the opening arguments, and is often followed immediately by the *confutatio*, which refutes those arguments. This contrast was seen as a means of strengthening the speaker's primary thesis. In the early versions of this cantata, no. 6 Chorus "Was betrübst du dich, meine Seele" would have served as the heart of the cantata's middle section, acting as both the *confirmatio* and the *confutatio*. The ensemble begins the movement by asking, "Was betrübst du dich, meine Seele, und bist so unruhig in mir?" (Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you so disquieted within me?) (See Figure 5)

Though the text alone implies a narrator who has already arrived at the answer to this question, Bach utilizes diminished harmonies and harried polyphonic entrances to emphasize instead the sentiment of uncertainty and unrest, with the tutti sections playing a role not unlike the turba chorus in one of his passions. (See Figure 6, next page)

Figure 6. No. 6 Cborus, mm. 10-17

The musical score consists of nine staves. The top two staves are instrumental. The next three staves contain the vocal line with lyrics. The bottom two staves are instrumental. The tempo is marked 'Spirituoso' and the measure number '10' is indicated at the beginning. The key signature has two flats (F minor). The lyrics are: 'le, und bist so un - ru - hig, und bist so un - See - le, und bist so un - ru - hig, und bist so un - ru - hig, und bist so un - - le, und bist so un - ru - hig, und bist so un - ru - hig, und le, und bist so un - ru - hig, und bist so un - ru - hig,'

The key in no. 6 is also ambiguous, beginning in F minor, but with frequent, abrupt half cadences that remind the listener of the home key of C minor. The key of F minor sounds more directly despondent: Mattheson describes it as perfect for a heavy feeling of despair and anxiety, and “very moving...in its beautiful expression of black, helpless melancholy which occasionally causes the listener to shudder.”<sup>32</sup> These rhetorical devices offer further proof or emphasis upon the initial problem presented in the opening movements, as expected in the *confirmatio* section of

an oration. After an unexpectedly tender transition in E-flat at the text “*Harre auf Gott*” (Wait upon God), the music launches into a spirited fugue in C minor, setting the words “*dass er meines Angesichtes Hülfe und mein Gott ist*” (For I shall yet thank Him for being the help of my countenance and my God). Ending with a cadence in C major, this fugue overthrows the initial argument of God’s abandonment, offering instead the potential for resolution. This latter half of the movement acts as the *refutatio*, or refutation of the opening argument. (See Figures 7 and 8, next pages.)

<sup>32</sup>Mattheson and Lenneberg, 236.





In this way, the two halves of this integral movement combine to present the strongest arguments, for and against the initial declaration of unrest. The emotional significance of no. 6 should also be apparent in performance. Large contrasts in tempo and dynamic would certainly be appropriate here, to further highlight the pivot between the confirming and refuting points. The communication of the growing conflict between these two ideas should be paramount.

The surrounding movements of this stable middle section include recitatives, duets, and solos which further explore these conflicting emotions. Each could easily receive a label from Mattheson's list offered above. No. 3, the soprano aria, "*Seufzer, Thränen, Kummer, Noth*" could serve as the *divisio*, spelling out the crucial points which the listener must hold in mind. Also in a lamenting C minor and featuring an oboe obbligato, this movement depicts the narrator's weeping through a series of falling gestures in both the oboe and voice. Once again, Bach incorporates gestures of silence to add to the dramatic effect, including a stunning example of *synecdoche* at the word "Schmerz" ("pain") in m. 22. (See Figure 9.)

The tenor solo, "*Bäche von gesalznen Zähren*" (no. 5), offers further proof of the points enumerated in the soprano solo (no. 3), acting as a *confirmatio*. The narrator's tears, represented both literally in the text and figuratively in the flowing motive of the strings,

provides confirmation of his suffering. In the key of F minor, it testifies to the despair of the narrator, expertly setting up the pivotal movement that it precedes.

On the other side of the focal sixth movement, the duets between soprano and bass (nos. 8 and 9), representing the soul and Jesus, once again present supporting and opposing arguments simultaneously within a single movement, this time in a playful back and forth more reminiscent of an operatic love-duet than a sacred work. Beginning the official second section of the cantata, these movements would have followed a sermon. The congregation would have had a moment to digest the first portion of the work, reflect on the text's ideals via the sermon, and then re-enter the story. Strikingly, here Bach welcomes the listener back into the cantata with the unexpected arrival of B-flat major. Mattheson describes this key as "diverting and showy...both magnificent and delicate,"<sup>33</sup> and it was typically utilized for romantic scenes in opera. The duet movement is nothing if not entertaining and cheeky, and certainly rhetorical, as the singers parley back and forth between "ja" and "nein," "leben" and "sterben," "verloren" and "erkoren."

Following this back and forth, the penultimate choral movement, "*Sei nun wieder zu Frieden*" (no. 9), represents a fulcrum in the cantata's narrative. Here, the rhetorical structure takes a turn, and the refuting

Figure 9. *Synecdoche* in No. 3 soprano solo, mm. 19-24

<sup>33</sup>Mattheson and Lenneberg, 236.

arguments become the winning arguments. This movement affirms the persuasive idea: to remain at peace while trusting in the Lord's presence through any suffering. Noting that this was the final movement in the cantata's earlier form, it could also be considered the *conclusio*. In the larger version of the work, it acts more like a bridge into the happier, final section of the work. In this final section, the narrator has conquered his feelings of sorrow and found meaning, comfort, and even joy in the presence of God.

The movement is set in G minor, and as Mattheson states so eloquently at the start of his chapter on keys, the idea that minor keys express sad emotions and major keys happy ones is oversimplified. G minor is a prime example of a minor key that can express more subtle, positive emotions: "It is suitable for tender as well as refreshing things, for yearning as well as happy ones. In short, it lends itself well and flexibly to moderate plaintiveness and tempered gaiety."<sup>34</sup> These

words match perfectly with the affect Bach creates in this movement. After the sorrowful and complicated journey through the first half of the cantata, only a "tempered gaiety" would be right for this moment. Even the text itself does not express unbridled joy. Surrounded by an ostinato-like plea for inner peace, the chorale text continues to ask questions, suggesting that the listener is not fully freed from sorrow, but that they should instead recognize God's presence within that sorrow.

This chorus is the first tutti movement without any sudden changes in affect and tempo. The musical idea remains consistent from start to finish, and with the exception of the change in texture from solo to tutti and the addition of doubling instruments at m. 117, there is no dynamic or registral change. A rather quick tempo, conducted in one rather than three, avoids any sort of monotony and solidifies the movement's role as a transition to joy.<sup>35</sup> (See Figure 10.)

Figure 10. Tutti entrance in No. 6, mm. 114-119

The musical score for Figure 10 shows the tutti entrance in No. 6, mm. 114-119. It features five staves: two for vocal parts (Soprano and Alto), two for vocal parts (Tenor and Bass), and one for the basso continuo line. The lyrics are: "frie - den, mei - ne See - le. frie - den, mei - ne See - le, Sei nun wie - der zu - frie - den, See - le, mei - ne See - le, sei nun wie - der zu - frie - den,". The basso continuo line includes figured bass notation: 7, 6, 6, #, 6, 6, 6, 6, #, 6. The score is in G minor and 3/4 time. The tempo is marked "tutti".

<sup>34</sup>Mattheson and Lenneberg, 235.

<sup>35</sup>Ton Koopman takes this movement at approximately quarter note = 120 on his 2007 recording. In contrast, Philippe Herreweghe's 2002 rendition is a more appropriate dotted-quarter = 53.

Figure 11. Setting of the pun “weinen, in lauterem wein”, No. 10 tenor solo, mm. 60-69

The time for unbridled joy finally does arrive in no. 10, “*Erfreue dich, Seele, erfreue dich, Herze.*” This tenor solo is the confirmatio of the second section of the work, representing a firm verification of the transformation set in motion in no. 6 (“*Sei nun wieder zu Frieden*”). Set in F major, this is only the second movement in a major key so far in the cantata. F major may have been Mattheson’s favorite, as he says it “is capable of expressing the most beautiful sentiments... generosity, steadfastness, love, or whatever else may be high on the list of virtues.”<sup>36</sup> Rather than simply joyful, the more nuanced emotion of this movement could be understood as a manifestation of the pun within its text “*Verwandle dich, Weinen, in lauterem Wein*” (Transform yourself, whining, into pure wine). (See Figure 11)

The *conclusio*, or peroration, is designed to appeal to the listener emotionally, “unbinding the wounds that [have been] made” and bringing a feeling of closure to the work.<sup>37</sup> Every source on rhetorical structure holds the peroration in highest regard: it is the moment to pull out all the stops, to overdo the emotion, and even to add elements of surprise.<sup>38</sup> It therefore seems fitting that the first sound of the final movement is that of three unexpected trumpets entering in a syncopated fanfare. A timpani also joins the orchestra, whose full forces are on display immediately. Bach chooses the key of C major for this final celebration, which is not only, according to Mattheson, “suitable to the expression of joy”<sup>39</sup> but a literal reversal of the C minor (see Figure 12, next page) that plagued the opening movements. A rhetorical figure of embellishment, called a *trillo*, dances prominently in the final fugue’s countersubject. (See Figure 13, following page)

<sup>36</sup>Mattheson and Lenneberg, 235.

<sup>37</sup>Tarling, 162.

<sup>38</sup>Tarling, 164.

<sup>39</sup>Mattheson and Lenneberg, 235.

Figure 12: Opening fanfare in mvt 11, m1-3

Grave

Tromba I

Tromba II

Tromba III

Timpani

Oboe

Violino I

Violino II

Viola

Soprano

Alto

Tenore

Basso

Fagotto

Violoncello  
Violone  
Organo (bez.)

tutti

Das Lamm, das er-wür-get ist, ist

Figure 13. *Trillo* in countersubject, No. 11 mm. 15-17

The image shows a musical score for a vocal piece. It consists of five staves. The top two staves are empty. The third staff is a vocal line in G major, 3/4 time, with the lyrics: "Lob und Eh-re und Preis und Ge-walt sei un- serm Gott von". The word "solo" is written above the first note. The fourth staff is a bass line with a trillo in the right hand and a simple bass line in the left hand. The trillo is marked with a "7" and a "6" above it. The fifth staff is empty.

This combination of key, instrumentation, and ornamental rhetorical gestures seems to be all at once an acknowledgement and a rejection of the opening movement, bringing us full circle from darkness to light, from proposition to assurance. It is at once surprising and emotional, celebratory and reflective—a fitting end to such an arduous journey. This is a moment for celebrating the ensemble’s virtuosity and dazzling the audience. To further the surprise element, the timpani and trumpets could certainly remain off-stage until the final movement.

It is equally impossible to guess what exactly Mattheson was thinking when he encountered Bach’s Cantata 21 as it is to guess exactly what Bach was thinking when he composed it. Yet it is indisputable that Bach’s compositional choices in *Ich hatte viel Bekümmernis*, both those that were deliberate and those that were intuitively felt, help to convey the message of the cantata’s journey effectively. Mattheson’s famous criticism falls far short in capturing the full power of Bach’s rhetorical expertise. From his careful planning of the overall structure of the work to his special nuance of the smallest emotional moments, Bach expertly brings the audience into the story and the emotion of this cantata.

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## An Interview with New York Polyphony

*The following are excerpts from an interview conducted with **Geoffrey Williams** (countertenor) and **Christopher Dylan Herbert** (baritone) of the vocal quartet New York Polyphony. The interview took place at the Eastman School of Music, and questions were prepared by Laura Lynch and Michael Alan Anderson.*

**Q:** You met on the New York choir scene at The Church of St. Mary the Virgin, Times Square, in a professional choir of only nine people, who sang unaccompanied Renaissance masses and chant every week. You obviously share a passion for ensemble singing. How did you go from being church singers to GRAMMY®-nominated touring quartet?

**Geoffrey:** It's a lot harder work than we thought we were going to put in, but it's been a labor of love the whole time. The big break we got was in 2006, making a recording through Public Radio International, and that became the impetus for our concert programming and touring. It was a Christmas program that blended medieval plays and medieval carols with some modern settings of the same texts. That's really how we've programmed almost all of our concerts, with only a couple of exceptions. We have a few shows that are straight up early music, for when we are invited to some of the bigger early music festivals. But in the United States, when we're trying to force early vocal music—often sacred music—down

throats, we can disguise whole Renaissance masses as string quartets or other chamber music, and people seem convinced.

We've also had to figure out what kind of a business organization we wanted to be, and Chris [Herbert] has been really great with that. Did we want our organization to be an LLC or did we want to go to the nonprofit route? Our first two years, we had two or three concerts per year tops; we weren't doing too much, but we were recording some. With our second recording Tudor City, we got a big push from NPR's *All Things Considered*, which was nice because our first album only got recognized with good press in Europe and in the U.K. This is the still best-selling album we have; it was a really nice balance of old and new repertoire that really spoke to people.

**Q:** What memories do you have of the early years?

**Geoffrey:** It was mostly the sloppy process of figuring out how we wanted to hone the identity of the group. There are so many other groups that we could be "based on"—the Hilliard Ensemble, King's Singers, Chanticleer, Cantus... So what we wanted to do was to set ourselves apart from these and other professional choirs who sing a broader repertoire than we do we do. We sing quite a lot of music from quite

a lot of centuries and not all sacred music. But we've been very careful to not program too much popular music, not because it's not valuable, it's just not our strong suit. We could go out and fake some vocal percussion, but there are so many groups that do it so much better. So we've been careful to refine our image visually and audibly through some hard choices about what we really want to say every time we step on stage. We are still the only professional male quartet in the States doing this mix of repertoire.

**Q:** How do you feel about not having a direct competitor?

**Christopher:** It's a problem that we're the only game in town in the United States for what we do. I wish there was more of an ecology for these styles. Part of it has to do with the difficulty of being a startup in New York. We've had a lot of friends who tried to start groups, small or large, and failed. We wish they had succeeded, because there's enough room for many more of us. But the reality is that the economics are really difficult. We have struggled with financials ourselves, but we've decided that this is a part of what we do.

**Geoffrey:** When people ask us for advice about their own groups, our first suggestion is often to curtail the revolving door personnel. There are a lot of groups that have one leader like a conductor and a rotation of other people. One of our biggest commitments is that we have to be the same people. We have had two personnel changes, and those took some time to settle. It takes a lot of patience and responsibility to commit to a certain sound and way of working that get you through rough days and good days. It's a difficult commitment. It's like a marriage, we say all the time.

**Christopher:** And indeed every once in a while, we have the thought, "Are we going to renew our vows?" But we're committed to our product, which remains concentrated and not diluted at all. New York Polyphony—that's the brand, that's what we offer. It was a struggle for me at the beginning—there were so many things we could do! We're always revisiting our identity with every new piece that comes our way, even if there is a commission. Is this what we want? There's already so much in the realm of Renaissance polyphony that, in many ways, it is plenty broad.

**Q:** To what extent are you providing educational outreach with this brand of early music?

**Geoffrey:** Early on, we were pretty worried about doing educational outreach because there were other people and groups at the time doing this and doing it better. We had maybe 25 or 30 pieces we could sing

for people, and you just can't sing thirteenth-century medieval carols to fourth graders. But we do believe we have a shot at connecting with high school or college singers much better. We set a goal about five years ago that we need to be better at doing workshops of this sort. So, we made the choice to up our academic game and try to get the highest degrees we could. I myself finished the DMA program at the University of Illinois where I was able to catch up on the choral music scene, new composers, and how to approach working with younger singers. Others have been teaching voice at the collegiate level. So that's also kept us interested and given us some momentum for the years ahead.

**Q:** You have a carefully curated brand image and a slogan "Early music. Modern sensibilities." You are all polished looking as well with trendy suits in concert. What is the image you aim for project? What do you want people to think when looking at your portfolio shot or on stage?

**Christopher:** From the very beginning our bass, Craig [Phillips], has been in charge of our image for the most part. His idea was that he wanted us to be edgy and leave behind the garden-variety black concert dress of many performing ensembles. The image is rooted in the notion that in New York City there was this kind of somewhat "sloppy" look, almost an "urban decay" feel, and there is a way to neaten that up ever-so-slightly and turn it into something that's more cutting-edge and polished. We're very much still on that road, and we think of these things when we purchase new suits. Even though we don't want to spend too much on wardrobe, we have to pay to look good.

**Geoffrey:** With our early photo shots, we worked with photographers we knew. But now Craig goes online and finds out who's doing shots of Anne Hathaway and Gwen Stefani. So we're looking well outside the classical music realm for image ideas. There are some classical artists, by the way, who look awesome, but in early music it was so easy to just take one step up.

**Q:** What is your strategy with YouTube videos?

**Geoffrey:** For our videos, we picked a few pieces of repertoire that would be easy to sight read, but more importantly could be done by high school or collegiate choirs. These pieces—like Palestrina's "Sicut cervus" and Victoria's "O magnum mysterium"—got many hits online. We really didn't rehearse these much. We found a decent sound engineer to edit everything with a two-camera shoot that took place between services at the Church of St. Mary the Virgin where we met.

**Q:** What do audiences seem to admire most about New York Polyphony? What do people tell you after you've given a concert?

**Christopher:** It really depends on the audience because each one is very different. Different countries have different feelings about our music. Some listeners say "I was completely blissing out. It was relaxing." Other people will say, "I can't believe you made so much sound for four people." Now that's not our intention but it's an ancillary result of matching vowels. Audiences with some background in our music will talk to us about very specific things, and that is always very gratifying. They are listening very intently and are getting closer to the reason we're doing this.

**Geoffrey:** Sometimes we're cornered by an arm-chair musicologist with a question we can't answer, usually a "[musical] ficta rabbit hole." Our brains are not always ready for it.

**Q:** How do you program and select music? Do you listen to other recordings, browse libraries looking for music? How do you encounter it?

**Geoffrey:** We often start with one fairly chunky piece. Very early on, we were looking at a lot of medieval carols with modern settings of the same text. Then the next exploration was English Tudor music: I had some pieces I already liked. Next we arrived at Franco-Flemish polyphony, which we only knew peripherally, but it is one of the best things for this group because we are so low set as far as tessitura goes. I am not a particularly high alto. We started with two baritones instead of two middle tenors as you find in early music groups like the Hilliard Ensemble and Orlando Consort. But there was so much repertoire that we didn't need to fuss [i.e. transpose]; it was perfectly appropriate for us. We started with some [Thomas] Crecquillon and really came to love his Lamentations very much. We still enjoy coming back to them and will build things around pieces like this.

Another Franco-Flemish piece to build our early music cred was the *Requiem* by Antoine Brumel, which was an exciting piece to do. We had an editor at the time who was giving us wonderful performing editions. And he would say things like, "If you like that Clemens piece, you'll love this one!" or "Here are twelve more pieces I have that are similar to the one you like."

But, as we program, we had to be aware of our image at the same time. From the very first record, we have prided ourselves on the programming. What we don't want to do, with few exceptions, is something like "The Greatest Hits of Crecquillon." There was a time when we did want to say something like that.

Sometimes, I will listen to something and say, wow, these people recorded it one way, but we could say something very specific and different about this piece. For example, we recorded the famous *Pope Marcellus Mass* of Palestrina the way New York Polyphony would do it. And we paired it with the *Missa O quam gloriosum* of Victoria. Two big pieces—done! That's a repertory disc. But normally we will build around a larger work and then create a "tasting menu" from there. Once we find a sequence that works, it is really valuable to perform that ten or twelve times if we can.

**Q:** You sing a good deal of sacred music. How do you approach those texts?

**Christopher:** What we don't want to do is to evangelize with these texts. There's a place for that and people who do that, but it's not us. The text for us is a vehicle for music.

**Geoffrey:** We do however take a conscious approach with texts and try to express them. We don't have four different points of view as far as the sacred underpinnings of it. All of us have all been church singers forever and have a respect for the liturgical use of this music. I think we're aiming to have the rhetoric in mind along with the ritual moment for the music we are singing. We bring some theatricality to the Gloria for instance, but something more subdued for an Agnus Dei. We know the tenderness that is needed for a Benedictus, as opposed to how ceremonial and joyous the Sanctus should be.

**Q:** When New York Polyphony sings plainchant, it is a more robust sound and better blended than most early music ensembles. What are the keys to your chant sound?

**Christopher:** What we have tended to do is to try to identify the singer whose range covers that chant the best and then sing into that singer's sound. For example in the [Antoine] Brumel *Requiem*, some of the chants are quite low, so we try to sing into Craig's tone. If a chant is sitting in the middle, we try to go to my tone, so we don't transpose but rather sing it where it needs to be. We try to get into the sound of the person who is most dominant in that piece.

**Geoffrey:** We don't talk about blend as much as people think. There are just four of us. I, for example, don't have another alto to blend with on my part. We just try to balance our sound with the other parts. We do try to sing into a pocket of sound with chant or homophonic stuff. That's the great thing about polyphony, and why we have stuck with it—there are an awful lot of issues that go away.

**Q:** The subject of tuning is a minefield in early music. How do you approach it in the quartet?

**Christopher:** More than anything, we talk about vowels and its impact on tuning. Some of our most heated times in rehearsal have come around vowels. Sometimes we will look at one of the singers and say “your vowel needs to be rounder or taller.” Occasionally, there is frustration over this, and it’s easy to get isolated. That person is obviously trying their best and can be left wondering “how can I not be singing correctly?” In reality, it’s not about correct or incorrect, but rather about matching or not matching the vowels to create a ringing sound.

**Q:** Tell us about touring life. How do you arrange tours and what lessons have you learned from your experience on the road?

**Christopher:** Three of us are teachers; the other [Geoffrey] is a doctoral student. So when we want to tour, we generally set aside blocks of time that work for us. Then, our manager comes to us with dates, and we look to string multiple gigs together. We’re trying not to do a lot of run-out [single] concerts now. I have tended to book all of our travel directly, not through our agent. It would just be done poorly if we did not do it ourselves. And I think I’ve gotten really good at it: I’m careful about who needs to go at which time; it’s important that we are in a good place when we get together; the last thing we need is for someone to be sitting in the middle seat on a five-hour flight. We’ve also learned that we must arrive a day early before a concert even when we could arrive on the day of the concert.

**Geoffrey:** When we’re on tour, Chris and I tend to do more sightseeing and Craig will sometimes come with us. Steve [Caldicott Wilson, tenor] tends to do things a little more independently. At the same time, Chris and Steve are runners, while Craig and I are early risers, so we’ll go find a local place in the morning for breakfast. We all have dinner together sometimes, and we like to hang out. It’s nice to have our own hotel rooms, and when we travel by car together, Craig usually drives and Steve usually has his headphones on in the car. Chris usually has his usually has grades to do in the back. I sometimes am the navigator.

**Q:** How do you approach recording sessions versus performance?

**Geoffrey:** For me, recording has very much been how we built our identity, not with a cold or unhuman type of singing but with a very clean, free, and accurate sound that is vetted. Recording in front of microphones requires a kind of precision that we can

then carry into our performances. On the other hand, we are careful not to record anything that we have not performed enough in concert.

**Christopher:** For me, recordings are full of stress, and I put a lot of pressure on myself, which can put pressure on everyone else. When I’m performing though, I can be in the moment and move through it; when you’re done, you can say “that was that”! Recordings just take so much concentration and effort.

**Geoffrey:** It does take a lot of focus. But there’s an energy in recording that you don’t always find in performance. There’s an urgency to it, and it can be a risk in affecting the vocals. It’s kind of like ice skating, where you have to let go a little bit to get a good result. We sing things in recordings almost exclusively quieter than we ever would sing in shows, because we can. That kind of intricate work is exhausting, and it’s really a challenge to us personally.

**Christopher:** We never set ourselves up for that kind of risk in a concert. We always make sure that we’ve got enough time to have the suits pressed and ready, that we are not rehearsing up to the last minute, and if we are doing new pieces, rarely do we do a completely new program. We’ve never sung 65 minutes of music we have never done in concert before.

**Geoffrey:** You can fail in a recording; you can’t fail in a live show. So, you can fail yourself in a live show but there’s an aspect of needing to have to show your face after a live show. In a recording, if you fail, you can always try again, so it’s not as pressured. I like the immediacy in a live show.

**Q:** You’ve had a number of commissions to pair with your diet of medieval and Renaissance music. How much control do you have with composers that you commission?

**Christopher:** It really depends on the composer. Sometimes we say, “We can’t do this”; other times we have to finagle a bit; and still other times, composers will spoil us right from the start. Andrew Smith, for example, writes for us like he’s been in the band.

**Geoffrey:** Sometimes, we talk about what our big sellout project is. If we were to do a crossover project, what would it be? Michael McGlynn wrote for us one time. He’s famous for his setting of the Irish text *Dúlamán*. We can’t do *Dúlamán*. So he “came our way” and wrote modern polyphony in a piece called “*O pia Virgo*.” It’s fabulous, and we love performing it. That’s the kind of collaboration we need. It’s not that we’re not willing to go to other worlds, but it has to be something that we can succeed at.

Q: So what's next? What will we read about New York Polyphony five years from now?

**Geoffrey:** I've given up caring about the Grammy. Steve still wants a Grammy. I'd like a Gramophone award; I don't know why. I think mostly because I still feel like we need to prove ourselves a bit more as an international ensemble. We hope to have made it to all fifty states—we are now at 42. Our South American debut came in January 2019 in Colombia followed by our debut in Italy two months later. We'll have at least two new recordings coming out, plus another Christmas album, more commissioning projects, some world premieres, and hopes for more work with female composers.

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