

The Musician as Orator:
The 17th-c *Praeludium* and Rhetorical Principles

by

Leon W. Couch III

WRITING IS “IN-PROCESS”!

© 2005 Leon W. Couch III

The science of public speaking is, after all, a sort of musical science, differing from vocal and instrumental music in degree, not in kind.¹

Dionysius (ca. 30 B.C.E.)

Introduction

1. The *stylus phantasticus* style of seventeenth-century German not only recognized as dramatic but in fact rhetorical.
2. Even in the more explicit organ repertory surveys, little guidance for performance in understanding organization and meaning of whole works, beyond the application of a few labels for rhetorical sections and figures.
3. Will provide a intellectual background and pragmatic examples of a musical-rhetorical interpretation with a few select North German Toccatas.²

Intellectual History on Musical Rhetoric espoused in 16th–18th c Treatises

The goal of music is to teach, to delight, and to move. This goal is common to the musician and the orator, although the musician uses different means than does the orator.

Jan Albert Ban (1637)³

¹Dionysius, *De Compositione Verborum*, 28–29, as translated in Charles Sears Baldwin, *Ancient Rhetoric and Poetic: Interpreted from Representative Works* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1924), 112.

²The most decisive definition of the term “North German Toccatas” can be found in a summary of Powell’s 1969 dissertation: Kenneth G. Powell, “An Analysis of the North German Organ Toccatas,” *The Diapason* 62 (April 1971): 27. A revised definition can be found in Leon W. Couch III, “Musical-Rhetorical Analysis and the North German Toccatas,” (Univ. Cincinnati: Ph.D. dissertation, 2003), 3.

³Jan Albert Ban, *Dissertatio epistolica de musicae natura, origine, progressu, et denique studio bene instituendo* (Leyden, 1637), 110). Latin quote in Brewster Rogerson, “*Ut Musica Poesis: The Parallel of Music and Poetry in Eighteenth Century Criticism*” (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1945), 48. Translation by Byron Stayskal. Ban is imitating Cicero's three "offices" of the orator: *docere, delectare*, and *movere*. (See Cicero, *Orator*, 69.) Quintilian emphasizes Cicero’s three “office of rhetoric”: Marcus Fabius Quintilian, *The Instituto Oratoria of*

1. By replacing the word “rhetoric” with “music” in Cicero’s text, the Dutch composer Jan Albert Ban (1597–1644) summarizes the goals of music-making within the world of northern German religious venues.
2. As the seventeenth century progressed, Martin Luther’s emphasis on teaching theology (as obviously reflected in J. S. Bach’s *Clavierübung III*, for instance) transformed to moving listeners to emotional states.
3. The *stylus phantasticus* passages in the music of Buxtehude, Bruhns, and others seem to be the full flowering of this move towards affect. This humanistic desire to persuade listeners through the passions reflects authors recapturing effects described in rhetoric manuals.
4. As described by Bartel and Couch,⁴ this flowering of dramatic music in this generation before Bach resulted from the fusing of several beliefs in the forge of pragmatic Lutheran theology. Bartel, Couch, and others describe this at length. (See Diagram 1, revised from Diapason article but with corrections (doctrines of affections)).

Rhetorical Structures within the North German Toccata

Rhetoric instructs how the subject should be disposed [arranged in order] in order to put it into the music and teaches the musician how he must imitate the figures of rhetoric in making various *passagi, diminuzione, fuge, conseguenze*, etc.⁵
 Marin Mersenne (1627)

Our musical disposition is different from the rhetorical arrangement of a mere speech only in the theme, subject, or object.⁶

Johann Mattheson (1739)

1. Although most writers remark on musical motives and dramatic gestures (figures), the most clear parallel between these compositions and oratory is a method of investigating the

Quintilian (90 C.E.), Vol. III, trans. H.E. Butler (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1922–1939, reprint ed., Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), 181. His bio: http://www.dbnl.org/tekst/bran038biog01/bran038biog01_0184.htm

⁴For more historical background, see Dietrich Bartel, *Musica Poetica: Musical-Rhetorical Figures in German Baroque Music* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1997); Leon W. Couch III, “Musical Rhetoric in Three Präludia of Dietrich Buxtehude,” *The Diapason* (March 2000): 14–19; and idem., D.M.A. thesis, Chapters 4–5.

⁵Marin Mersenne (1588–1648), *Traité de l’Harmonie Universelle* (Paris: Guillaume Baudry, 1627), 21, translated in Gregory Butler, “Fugue and Rhetoric” *Journal of Music Theory* 21 (1977): 62. On pp. 17–18, see Mersenne’s views on musical dispositions. Also paraphrased in Mark Evan Bonds, *Wordless Rhetoric: Musical Form and the Metaphor of the Oration* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1991), 93.

⁶Johann Mattheson, *Der vollkommene Capellmeister* (1739), translated and commentary by Ernest Charles Harriss (George Peabody College for Teachers, Ph.D., 1969), 751.

compositional process and dissecting the musical-rhetorical form. (See Tables 1–2
Compositional process & goals of musical-rhetorical sections.)

2. If one were to explain to a student how a composer strikes upon an idea, creates a musical work, and performs it, one might end up with Mattheson's adaptation of Pseudo-Cicero's model for rhetoric (Table 1). Although a composer might not follow such steps, it is useful to discussing musical composition.

3. More important to the performer of the repertory, the musical form replace the dull generalization that NGTs alternate toccata and fugal textures with a more dynamic reading of each musical-rhetorical section. The explanatory power of such labels not only justify this seemingly musically incoherent music but, as we will see, also suggest attitudes towards performance interpretations.

4. Summarize each musical-rhetorical section briefly.⁷

5. Other types of rhetorical sections/moves that must be identified: Digressions, for instance, in BuxWV 137 (fughetta)

Music and Oratory affect Listeners through *mimesis* (signs of the passions)

Both rhythms and melodies contain representations of anger and mildness, and also of courage and temperance and all their opposites and the other moral qualities, that most closely correspond to the true natures of these qualities (and this is clear from the facts of what occurs—when we listen to such representations we change in our soul); and habituation in feeling pain and delight at representations of reality is close to feeling them towards actual reality.⁸

Aristotle

1. Passages in rhetoric manuals such as the one above certainly must be suggestive to any musician reading them. Aristotle's concept of *mimesis*, that is that oratory and other arts use signs of the affections to create affections in perceivers, pervades rhetoric manuals and practical seventeenth-century singing manuals. (*Musica poetica* treatises of course implicitly or explicitly reply upon such a concept, but the point here is that performers need to know figures.)

2. Cicero's quote below could have just as easily been found in Bernhard's singing treatise:

For nature has assigned to every emotion a particular look and tone of voice and bearing of its own; and the whole of a person's frame and every look on his face and utterance of his voice are like the strings of a harp, and sound according as they are struck by each successive emotion. For the tones of the voice are keyed up like the strings of an instrument, so as to answer to every touch, high, low, quick, slow, *forte*, *piano*, while between all of these in their several kinds there is a medium note; and there are also the various modifications derived from these,

⁷Summary and evaluation of other musical-rhetorical readings of form by Lena Jacobsen, Sharon Gorman, and Couch, can be found in Couch, D.M.A. thesis, Chapter 11.

⁸Aristotle, *Politics*, as quoted in Oliver Strunk, *Source Readings in Music History: Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (New York: W. W. Norton, Inc., 1965), 18. For more on the concept of *mimesis* and the Baroque period, see my D.M.A. thesis, Chapter 2.

smooth or rough, limited or full in volume, *tenuto* or *staccato*, faint or harsh, *diminuendo* or *crescendo*.
Cicero⁹ (54 BCE)

3. Rousseau for instance states that

Melody, in imitating the inflections of the voice, expresses laments, cries of pain or joy, threats, or groans; all the vocal significations of the passions are within its domain. It imitates the inflections of different languages, and the rise and fall caused in each idiom by certain movement of the soul. It does not merely imitate, it speaks; and its language—inarticulate but vivid, ardent, passionate—has a hundred times more energy than speech itself. Jean-Jacques Rousseau¹⁰

4. How does this apply to instrumental music? Instrumental music vocal music, which in turn natural signs of the passages. Bach’s student, Scheibe, describes this:

Instrumental music itself is rooted in vocal music. Because vocal music concerns itself with a text which can indicate the specific affection, it can justifiably be said that the root of the figures through which the affections are expressed is also to be found in vocal music. Thus one learns to differentiate between the figures’ form and content through vocal music. Only then can they be applied to instrumental music, which concerning the expression of the affections, is nothing other than an imitation of vocal music.¹¹ Johann Adolf Scheibe (1745)

5. Quintilian’s manual seems to suggest this and also describes one difference between oratory and music, the amount of repetition (something Ahle spends quite a while on):

Unlike music, oratory has no interest in the variation of arrangement and sound to suit the demands of the case. But eloquence does vary both tone and rhythm, expressing sublime thoughts with elevation, pleasing thoughts with sweetness, and ordinary with gentle utterance, and in every expression of its art is in sympathy with the emotions of which it [music] is the mouthpiece. It is by raising, lowering or inflexion [sic] of the voice that the orator stirs the emotions of his hearers, and the measure, if I may repeat the term, of voice or phrase differs according as we wish to rouse the indignation or the pity of the judge. For, as we know, different emotions are roused even by the various musical instruments, which are incapable of reproducing speech.¹² Quintilian (80 C.E.)

⁹Cicero, *De Oratore* (54 B.C.E), Book III, 173.

¹⁰Jean-Jacques Rousseau, “Essai sur l’origine des langues,” in his *Écrits sur la musique* (Paris: Stock, 1979), 229, as quoted in Bonds, 67.

¹¹Johann Adolf Scheibe, *Der critische Musikus* (1745), 685, translated in Bartel, 150.

¹²Quintilian, Vol. I, 171–73, as part of a larger discussion of the value of music studies to an orator, 165–77.

Signs of the Passions identified by Baroque Authors

Musical execution may be compared with the delivery of an orator. The orator and the musician have, at bottom, the same aim in regard to both the preparation and the final execution of their productions, namely to make themselves master so of the hearts of their listeners, to arouse or still their passions, and to transport them now to this sentiment, now to that. Thus it is advantageous to both, if each has some knowledge of the duties of the other.¹³

Johann Joachim Quantz (1752)

1. polysemous and polyatheous
2. Diagrams 2–3 *Musica Poetica* Treatises
(Mention in footnote Vicker's and others' criticism of borrowing names, esp. Burmeister's)
3. Mode/Key/Interval Affections

Performers must be aware of Musical-Rhetorical Devices and the Affections

Rhetoric and poetics are so closely related to the art of music that anyone wishing to study music seriously cannot afford to remain ignorant of them. All of these arts work toward a common goal: to master our feelings, and to give our passions a certain direction.¹⁴

Johann Joseph Klein (1783)

1. Although Klein was writing nearly a century later than Buxtehude composed, it seems his admonition applies perhaps even more strongly to the North German Toccata, where musical unity does not keep a piece going.
2. The sixteenth-century theorist seems to agree about the importance of rhetoric:

The singer ought to consider the mind of the musical poet as well as the vernacular or Latin poet, and imitate the composition with his voice, and use diverse ways of singing as there are diverse ways of composition Now [the orator] speaks loudly, now softly, and more slowly, and more rapidly, and with this he moves the listeners very much. . . . The same ought to be in music, because if the orator moves the listeners by means of the above-stated procedures, how much better and greater will be the effect made by music, recited with the

¹³Johann Joachim Quantz, *Versuch einer Anweisung die Flöte traversière zu spielen*, trans. and ed. By Edward R. Reilly, 199, as quoted in Vincent P. Benitez, "Musical-Rhetorical Figures in the *Orgelbüchlein* of J. S. Bach." *Bach* 18 (1987): 6.

¹⁴Johann Joseph Klein, *Versuch eines Lehrbuchs der praktischen Musik* (Gera: C. F. Bekmann, 1783), 15, as quoted in Mark Evan Bonds, *Wordless Rhetoric: Musical Form and the Metaphor of the Oration* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1991), 59.

same orders, accompanied by a well-united harmony.¹⁵
Vicentino, *L'Antica musica*,

2. Writing right before Buxtehude's school of composers started composing, Herbst agrees:

Just as the function of an orator is not only to adorn a speech with beautiful graceful, vivid words and splendid figures, but also to deliver it correctly and to move the affections; just as he therefore sometimes raises his voice, sometimes lowers it, sometimes speaks quietly, and softly, sometimes loudly and fully; so also the function of a musician is not only to sing, but also to sing artfully and gracefully. Thus the heart of the listener is stirred and the affections are moved; thus the song can achieve the end for which it was made and to which it is directed. Therefore a singer must not only be endowed by nature with a splendid [sic] voice, but also educated with a good understanding and perfect knowledge of music.¹⁶
Johann Andreas Herbst (1658)

3. Doesn't apply to listeners, who need not (and hopefully are not) concentrated on the technique of delivery but rather are simply moved.

4. Even though derived primarily from 18th-c treatises, the Table of Performance techniques from Wessel could be useful.

Attaining Awareness of Late 17th-c Styles (performance practice)

All these faculties we can acquire by three means: Theory, Imitation, and Practice. By theory is meant a set of rules that provide a definite method and system of speaking. Imitation stimulates us to attain, in accordance with a studied method, the effectiveness of certain models in speaking. Practice is assiduous exercise and experience in speaking.¹⁷

Pseudo-Cicero (90 BCE)

1. Kirnberger agrees:

In fact, every passion and every sentiment—in its intrinsic effect as well as in the words by which it is expressed—has its faster or slower, more violent or more passive tempo. . . . Thus I must admonish the aspiring composer above all that he

¹⁵Vicentino, *L'Antica musica*, f. 94 (trans. Kaufmann, 162), quoted in Blake McDowell Wilson, "Ut Oratoria Musica in the writings of Renaissance Music Theorists," in *Festa Musicologica: essays in Honor of George J. Buelow*, ed. Thomas J. Mathiesen and Benito V. Rivera (New York: Pendragon Press, 1995), 364.

¹⁶Johann Andreas Herbst, *Musica moderna prattica* (Frankfurt, 1658), 2, trans. in Benito V. Rivera, *German Music Theory in the Early 17th Century: The Treatises of Johannes Lippius* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1980), 55.

¹⁷Pseudo-Cicero, 9.

study diligently the nature of every passion and sentiment with regard to tempo. . . . However, this is a field that is not limited to music, and that the composer has in common with orator and poet.¹⁸

Kirnberger (1782)

1. discuss the above.

Application: Musical Figures in BuxWV 146

There is no more effective method of exciting the emotions than an apt use of figures.¹⁹
Quintilian (80 C.E.)

One could even say, they [rhetorical figures] are the language of the passions. Everyone who is possessed by a certain affection will naturally and involuntarily invent figures.²⁰
Johann Christoph Gottsched (1736)

pg. 1–2 relationships between affect, rhetorical purpose, and constellations of musical signs
how to determine a “message” or a “meaning” for a piece

Concentrate on f-sharp minor, BuxWV 146

1. Morose downward o7 in theme (saltus duriusculus)
2. Use of silence figures (abruptio & aposiopesis)
3. Use & purpose of Noëma

Role of Fugue in NGT

A mode should be elected and chosen that finely agrees with the word or the material of the text²¹
Johann Andreas Herbst (1643)

For the invention of a good and expressive melody, the first consideration of the composer must be directed at the choice of mode²²

Johann Philipp Kirnberger (1779)

¹⁸Kirnberger, 376.

¹⁹Quintilian, Vol. III, 359.

²⁰Johann Christoph Gottsched, *Ausführliche Redekunst* (Leipzig, 1736), 276, as translated in Bartel, 72.

²¹Johann Andreas Herbst, *Musica Poetica* (Nuremberg: J. Dümler, 1643), 83, as quoted and translated in Zay V. David Sevier, “The Theoretical Works and Music of Johann Georg Ahle (1651–1706)” (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of North Carolina, 1974), 74.

²²Johann Philipp Kirnberger, *The Art of Strict Musical Composition* (1771–79), trans. David Beach and Jurgen Thym (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 328.

1. Role of fugal “logic” to prove mode, supposedly one of the most important carriers of affect.
2. Hit important modal boundaries with S and tonal A
3. Use S and A over two successive points of imitation, and then the proving of the mode is done and fugues fall apart generally.
4. BuxWV 137 straight forward points of imitation
5. Lübeck — when traditional (19th-c) musical form doesn’t line up with points of imit.
6. Incidentally, invertible counterpoint is another common method of achieving a sense of logical proof (dialectic).
7. Bruhns e, first two is two points of imit.
8. Whatever the means of proof, identifying the segments of musical “argument” helps one find places to rest rather than playing an undifferentiated stream of entries. One doesn’t need to be side tracked with figures or rubato, but impart a feeling of logic.
9. In summary, the most important role of fugue is to establish a theme and prove its mode.

Identifying Topics and Affections of a Musical Speech: BuxWV 136, 137, and 146

The greatest difficulty in producing another’s work probably consists in the fact that a sharp power of discernment is required to succeed in divining the sense and meaning of other people’s thoughts. Whoever has never learned how the composer might prefer to have it himself, will scarcely be able to perform it well, but will often deprive the thing of its true form and charm so that the *Autor* [sic], if he should hear it himself, would scarcely know his own work.²³

Johann Mattheson (1739)

1. No one-to-one correspondence between meaning and sign in music, but, when enough congregate, the intersection between them is generally obvious.

BuxWV146 topic

1. Subject of death pervasive in Lutheran chorales found in BuxWV 146, but in a much more dramatic way.
2. Mode, *f#* minor (see Mattheson’s description & consider tuning)
3. Slow tempo (see table of performance techniques)
4. Morose downward *o7* in theme (*saltus duriusculus*) — a downward cry
5. Use of silence figures (*abruptio* & *aposiopesis*) — imitation of weeping and stopping musical speech due to overwhelming grief
6. Use & purpose of *Noëma* — cool the toccata as it builds from p. 1
7. Dwells on difficulty in *confutationes* more than major-keyed works

BuxWV 136–37 topic

1. Witty, youthful joy in BuxWV 136 and 137
2. Mode, CM (see Mattheson)

²³Johann Mattheson, *Der vollkommene Capellmeister* (1739), trans. Ernest Charles Harriss (George Peabody College for Teachers, Ph.D., 1969), 1450.

3. Spielfuge and canzona themes
4. Silly rhythms in both, both esp. 136
5. Flamboyant runs
6. Don't dwell on difficulty in *confutationes*

Musical-Rhetorical Proof and Registration: Bruhns em, BuxWV 137, and Lübeck GM

1. Simplicity of expression in major-keyed works, but point of rhetorical areas and form.
2. BuxWV140, and point of rhetorical passages in exordium (esp. rhetorical asides), fugue, *confutationes* & false witness, etc. Complex musical-rhetoric.
2. How to get it fit together in a persuasively rhetorical way.
3. Difference between oratory and theater, one speaker rebutting forecasted counter-arguments vs. more than one actor.
4. Difference between rhetorical and narrative analysis

Conclusions

1. Likely that these ideas about the connection between rhetoric and music would be compatible with contemporary (17th-c) discussion and aesthetics evidenced in treatises.
2. Drawing upon concepts from Rhetoric allows one to perceive artwork from conception through composition to performance as one process (Table 1).
3. The seemingly haphazard placement of materials and motives can be seen as expressions of musical-rhetorical desires and well used for the musical-rhetorical purposes of each section. (Superior than NGT following alternation principle.)
4. Identification of mode and salient other musical signs (figures, intervals, etc.) can be used to formulate a message and affect.
5. Such an affect and message, although not necessarily verifiable, aid the performer choose tempo, rubato, registrations, and so forth in order to achieve a persuasive, holistic interpretation. After all, it is not unreasonable to think of wild messages. Also having lived around Hamburg, Johann Mattheson recognized Buxtehude's extraordinary ability to paint stories in his keyboard suites:

BUXTEHUDE (Dietrich), the similarly highly esteemed former organist at Lübeck, also wrote like things with good success in his time and well portrayed, among other things, the character of the planets in seven clavier suites. It is unfortunate that little or nothing is printed of this fine artist's profound clavier pieces in which most of his strength hides.²⁴ Johann Mattheson (1739)

²⁴Ibid., 461, in a digression within his discussion of *loci topici*. Mattheson refers to Buxtehude's reputation and virtuosity several times in his later *Grundlage einer Ehren-Pforte* (Hamburg: Verlegung des Verfassers, 1740).