



In 1668, the Danish-German musician Dietrich Buxtehude succeeded Franz Tunder as organist and Werkmeister (administrator and treasurer) of the Marienkirche in the German city of Lübeck, where he would serve for thirty-nine years until his death in 1707. As was customary in Lübeck, the incoming organist was obligated to marry one of the daughters of his predecessor, a statute which prevented the both George Frideric Handel and Johann Mattheson from considering the post during their visit to Lübeck in 1703. Buxtehude, however, complied, marrying Tunder's daughter Anna Margareta, even agreeing for a time to pay Tunder's widow nearly a third of his salary, a condition about which he constantly complained.

Buxtehude also continued Tunder's tradition of *Abendmusik*, a series of oratorio concerts on the five Sundays before Christmas. The *Abendmusik* series contributed greatly to Buxtehude's fame; in fact, in 1705, the twenty-year-old J.S. Bach walked 250 miles from Arnstadt to Lübeck to hear and perhaps even study with Buxtehude. This trip can be viewed as the culmination of a childhood goal for Bach, since the recent discovery of the Weimar tablature confirms that Bach admired Buxtehude already at the age of thirteen, when he copied Buxtehude's massive chorale fantasia, *Nun freut euch lieben Christen gmein* (BuxWV 210) by hand.

The *Magnificat primi toni* (BuxWV 203) is a supreme example of the North German *stylus phantasticus*. Johann Mattheson describes this elusive term in connection to the "theatrical style," which he understands to be almost completely improvisatory, and bound neither to text nor melody, but only to the rules of harmony. Curiously, Mattheson also uses the phrase *a mente non a penna* (i.e. improvised) to describe the fugues that he and Handel composed in the coach on the way to visit Buxtehude in 1703. William Porter has shown that the eight various free and fugal sections (not counting the *Lento* section) of BuxWV 203 set two complete statements of the Magnificat chant, utilizing the incipit, mediant cadence, second incipit, and termination as primary melodic material for each section.

The image shows two staves of musical notation in bass clef. The first staff is labeled 'incipit' and 'mediant cadence'. The notes are: G2, A2, B2, C3, D3, E3, F3, G3, A3, B3, C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5. The lyrics below are: Et ex - sul - ta - vit Spi - ri - tus me - us. The second staff is labeled 'second incipit' and 'termination'. The notes are: G2, A2, B2, C3, D3, E3, F3, G3, A3, B3, C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5. The lyrics below are: in De - o sa - lu - ta - ri - me - o.

Like Buxtehude, Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck enjoyed a long, distinguished career in a single location, serving forty-four years at the Oude Kirche in Amsterdam. After the Calvinist Reformation of 1578, the organ was not allowed to sound during the liturgy itself, and Sweelinck was restricted to playing variations on Genevan psalm tunes before and after the services. However, since Sweelinck was officially employed by the city of Amsterdam, he regularly gave concerts before the opening of the stock market, a symbol of the wealth and erudition of the city. Such was Sweelinck's fame as an organist and teacher that he was known by his contemporaries as "The Orpheus of Amsterdam," Orpheus being the archetype of the inspired musician. The title is germane to tonight's concert, since Harald Vogel believes the *Chromatic Fantasia* to be a metaphor for the story of Orpheus. According to myth, Orpheus' wife Eurydice

died from a snake bite; overcome with grief, Orpheus played such sorrowful songs on the lyre that the gods wept. On their advice, he descends to the underworld, charming Cerberus, the three-headed dog who guards the entrance. Orpheus eventually reaches Hades and Persephone, the King and Queen of the underworld, and through his impassioned oration, combined with moving singing and playing of the lyre, convinces them to allow Eurydice to go. There is only one condition: as they ascend to the upper world, Eurydice must walk behind Orpheus, and he cannot look upon her. In his anxiety in the last instant, Orpheus turns around before Eurydice reaches the upper world, and she disappears forever.

The *Chromatic Fantasia* is an extraordinary work of contrapuntal mastery, and is justly one of the most famous keyboard works of the sixteenth century. It served a model for instrumental polyphony that was imitated throughout Europe in the seventeenth century. (The *Ricercare Prima* by Giovanni Battista Fasolo borrows the first thirty-four bars of Sweelinck's fantasia, and then continues in original counterpoint for only twenty-five bars.)



Sweelinck's subject, shown above, spans the descending chromatic tetrachord from d4 to a3 and is initially complimented by two countersubjects in strict invertible counterpoint at the octave. Later, the subject is utilized in rhythmic augmentation, diminution, and double diminution. Meanwhile, the surface rhythm steadily accelerates, altogether serving to create a multifaceted eight-minute crescendo. The most extraordinary passage of the piece occurs when the subject appears in four voice stretto, saturating the entire texture with chromaticism, which would be even more striking on the mean-tone temperament of Sweelinck's day. (The Craighead-Saunders organ, modeled after the 1776 Casparini instrument in Lithuania, is tuned at A=465 in Modified Neidhart 1732, Dorf temperament.)

The text *Vom Himmel hoch, da komm ich her* (usually translated, "From heaven above to Earth I come") was written by Martin Luther and first published in the Wittenberg in 1535. It describes God's descent to earth as Christ at Christmas. The melody was also written by Luther, and three of its four phrases feature descending lines, perhaps a metaphor for Christ's descent, the last phrase completing the full octave (shown below from d4 to d3).

The Partita on *Vom Himmel hoch* began as an improvisation, but has been worked out to the point of being a memorized composition with most of its details fixed. Each variation develops the same basic harmonic framework in a variety of textures. A unifying element is the three-note stepwise suspirens figure, which appears in every variation as a surface level ornament, and is derived from the first three notes of the tune (bracketed above). The first

variation features the unadorned tune in the soprano, complimented by a jovial, bassoon-like bassline in compound meter (the Positive 16' Dulcian played up an octave). The second variation again sets the unornamented tune in the soprano, this time accompanied by two lower voices moving in perpetual 16th notes. Variation three uses arpeggios with the tune in the alto voice, played on the Vox Campanarum (glockenspiel) and 4' flutes. The Vox Humana “sings” the aria in the fourth variation, accompanied by three lower voices (a texture borrowed from Bach’s first setting of *Nun komm’ der Heiden Heiland*, BWV 659). The trills and mordents, along with the tremulant, call to mind the vibrato of the human voice. The last variation, played on the full plenum registration, sets the tune as a cantus firmus in the pedal, with two *fugato* passages serving as *vorimitation*.

Juan Cabanilles, an ordained Catholic priest, served as organist of Valencia Cathedral from 1665 until his death in 1712, roughly the same length of service as both Buxtehude and Sweelinck. Cabanilles’ works comprise more than half of the seventeenth-century keyboard literature by known Spanish composers, and include a wide variety of styles, even though Spanish music as a whole remained stylistically conservative. Spanish music was largely tied to Renaissance vocal models and liturgical genres, as evidenced by the fact that all Spanish keyboard works until the eighteenth century were still written in open score.

The *Tiento por A la mi re*, perhaps one of Cabanilles’ best known works, consists of four sections, each of which sets the pitches “A-E-D” (the solfège syllables “la-mi-re” from the work’s title) in imitatively.



The opening section sets the subject shown above in both *inverso* and *recto* forms, while the last section applies rhythmic augmentation to the same subject and features a countersubject that is invertible both at the octave and the twelfth. The two middle sections are just as contrapuntally strict, but have a lighter, dance-like character. The title of this *tiento* has a second meaning: the three solemnization syllables “la mi re” indicate the position of the pitch “A” in the natural, soft, and hard hexachords (beginning on C, F, and G, respectively). This sort of “triangulated” position for tonic (or finalis) was common in titles in the Renaissance and early Baroque.

César Franck served as organist *titulaire* of the newly consecrated Sainte-Clotilde parish from 1858 until his death in 1890, playing the then-new three-manual Cavaillé-Coll organ. He wrote the *Six Pièces pour Grand Orgue*, Op. 20 between 1860 and 1862, which Rollin Smith hails as the most important organ music written since Mendelssohn’s Op. 56 sonatas (published in 1845). Liszt declared of the *Six Pièces*: “These poems have their clear place alongside the masterpieces of Sebastian Bach!” The *Prière*, No. 5 of the *Six Pièces*, is dedicated to Franck’s teacher Monsieur Benoist, whom Franck succeeded as Professor of Organ at the Paris Conservatory in 1872. R. J. Stove has speculated that the *Prière* may be a funerary tribute to Franck’s mother, who died in Paris on July 21, 1860. While one is tempted to hear hints of Wagner’s chromaticism in *Prière*, *Tristan* didn’t premier until 1865 (although *Lohengrin* and *Tannhäuser* had both premiered by 1860). Regardless, Franck was wary of Wagner’s shadow throughout his life. When a student tried to convince Franck of *Tristan*’s magnificence, he issued

this rebuke, referencing his own gigantic chorale work, *Les Béatitudes*: “After *Tristan* take the score of *Les Béatitudes*: What Wagner has done for human love, I have done for divine.”

With that quotation in mind, I suggest that the *Prière* mixes musical and religious symbolism to create a sort of operatic sonata form. The piece begins in C# minor and modulates to the major dominant of G# major, a key with eight sharps (or one double sharp). Since G# major lies outside the circle of fifths, I consider it a symbol for the divine—a realm which can be glimpsed, but not reached in this life. C# minor, in contrast, represents the mundane or earthly, whereas C# major symbolizes the height of human perfection, as it lies at the very edge of the circle of fifths. (In 19th century France, the organ itself was symbol for the divine, since the organ’s “breath” could continue hypothetically for all eternity.)

The unaccompanied, distant echo of the initial melody, played on the 8’ Cornopean and beginning the development section of the sonata, is marked “quasi-recitativo,” a clear reference to opera. In halting the regular flow of time (i.e., the tempo), this harmonically tumultuous middle section represents a sacred vision, a dream-state, or perhaps a memory—something otherworldly. In contrast, the *a tempo* which follows, marked “très mesuré,” coincides with the a melodic and symbolic descent back to C# minor, and acts as a retransition, preparing the recapitulation of the sonata form and a metaphorical “awakening”—a return to a base, sinful, and mundane reality.

Other symbols permeate the *Prière*, such as three-fold (Trinitarian?) repetitions of phrases, modulation by the interval of a third, supplicating sigh motives, and the juxtaposition of the “imperfect” (i.e. mundane) duple subdivision with the “perfect” (i.e. sacred) triple subdivision, a concept borrowed from Medieval mensural notation. The duple and triple rhythms are superimposed in the climactic C# major section in the recapitulation, symbolizing momentary oneness between divine and earthly realms. However, the *Prière* ultimately ends not in redemption, but in doubt. The final “gasps” of the organ may symbolize last breaths, while the final melodic lines gestures towards the heavens but falls down resignedly, both suggesting that the entire piece was a prayer on one’s deathbed.

Judging by their stylistic differences, scholars hypothesize that Bach’s *Prelude and Fugue in C minor* (BWV 546) were not composed at the same time. The monumental ritornello-form prelude, full of pathos (especially registered with the 8’ Trumpet and Tierce), has episodes which are themselves fugues, and likely dates from Leipzig. Compared with the supposed “weaknesses” of the earlier fugue (an “unambitious first countersubject, an out-of-style episode,” in Peter Williams’ words), some scholars have questioned whether the fugue was written or at least completed by Bach’s student, J.P. Kellner. However, a stile antico subject in half notes followed by another subject (in this case, a countersubject) in flowing eighth notes is typical of Bach’s style (cf. the C# minor fugue from the Well-Tempered Clavier, Book 1, BWV 849; the third movement of the second trio sonata, BWV 526 uses the exact same figure prominently). Given that the passage in question, seen below, is in fact both invertible counterpoint at the twelfth and a canon, together with the harmonic tension in general and the climactic Neapolitan D-flat chord in particular, Peter Williams has concluded that Bach is indeed the author of this fugue, since this level of contrapuntal mastery is likely beyond Kellner.

