Musical Symbolism

in J.S. Bach’s

“St. Anne” Prelude & Fugue
What We’ll Cover

1. Bach’s cultural/theological context. He lived (1685-1750) in the 1st half of the ‘Enlightenment’ (18th c.)

2. “St. Anne” Prelude & Fugue are the first & last piece of a larger collection

3. We’ll look at the musical symbolism in the Prelude & Fugue
# Plato’s Quadrivium

“The Four Ways” (5\textsuperscript{th}-4\textsuperscript{th} cent. BCE)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arithmetic</th>
<th>Geometry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Number in Space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(And number symbolism)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music</td>
<td>Astronomy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number in Time</td>
<td>Number in Space &amp; Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Theory only, no praxis)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
An example in practice: “Music of the Spheres”

- Combines all four: arithmetic + geometry + music + astronomy
- First introduced in Plato’s *Republic*, ascribed to Pythagoras (6th c. BCE mystic/mathematician)
- “Music of the Spheres”: a core idea in Western astronomy/astrology through Kepler (1571-1630 CE)
Astronomy & Music

Monochord by Robert Fludd, 1617
More about the Music Curriculum (Boethius 4th CE)

- *Musica Mundana* (‘music of the universe’) e.g. Music of the Spheres
- *Musica Humana* (‘human music’) Physical and spiritual harmony
- *Musica Instrumentalis* (‘instrumental music’) What we think of as ‘music’
Trivium
Capella’s “Three Ways” (3rd cent. CE)

- **Grammar**: How to articulate Knowledge
- **Logic**: Critical thinking
- **Rhetoric**: How to communicate Knowledge
Bach’s Liberal Arts Education
(How to think)

• Arithmetic
• Geometry
• Music
• Astronomy
• Grammar
• Logic
• Rhetoric

Q. What’s missing? A. Any other ‘Arts’!
Before & After the “Enlightenment”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Metaphysical (pre-18\textsuperscript{th} cent.)</th>
<th>Scientific (post 18\textsuperscript{th} cent.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Unseen</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>No such thing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(God, music of the</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>spheres, metaphysics)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Seen</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>All that there is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(The world, physics)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mode of</td>
<td>Analogical/</td>
<td>Mathematical/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>thinking</td>
<td>Metaphorical</td>
<td>Literal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Right brain?</td>
<td>Left brain?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Poetic?</td>
<td>Analytic?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Bach’s Musical Agenda

• Using \textit{musica instrumentalis} (actual music) to \textbf{portray} the \textit{musica mundana} and \textbf{promote} \textit{musica humana}

• ‘Musical symbolism’ is only in his sacred music (only half — 90 CDs! — has survived). Secular music is proportioned, but that’s it. (B.A.C.H.)

• The initial explication of Bach’s symbolism in his sacred music was by Albert Schweitzer
“All music…should have no other end and aim than the glory of God and the re-creation of the soul”

― J.S. Bach
“All music [musica instrumentalis]...should have no other end and aim than the glory of God [musica mundana] and the re-creation of the soul [musica humana]

— J.S.Bach
Clavier-Übung III

- Clavier-Übung ("Keyboard Praxis"): four volumes – most of what he published.
- III is the only volume for organ (the others are for harpsichord).
- III is known as the "German Organ Mass"
- III published 1739 (Bach was 54. I:1730, II:1735, IV:1741)
Clavier-Übung III Overview

- Prelude
- ‘Mass’ (9 chorale settings)
- ‘Catechism’ (12 chorale settings)
- ‘Duets’ (4 works)
- Fugue (the ‘postlude’)

3 sections between Prelude and Fugue

27 works in all = 3 x 3 x 3

(And this is volume THREE of the C-Ü!)
“Mass”
Luther advocated public & private ‘masses’.
NO settings based on hymns by Luther:

• Kyrie, Christe, Kyrie for organ with pedal
• Kyrie, Christe, Kyrie for organ without pedal
• Two Glorias for organ with pedal and one without

9 pieces in all, 3 groups of 3
Structure of Clavier-Übung III (2)

“Catechism”

ALL settings based on hymns by Luther. Luther published both a ‘greater’ and ‘lesser’ Catechism:

- The Ten Commandments (one with pedal, one without)
- The Creed (one with pedal, one without)
- The Lord’s Prayer (one with pedal, one without)
- Baptism (one with pedal, one without)
- Repentance (one with pedal, one without)
- Communion (one with pedal, one without)

12 hymn settings in all
Structure of Clavier-Übung III (3)

The Four “Duets”

No consensus on this, but lots of conjecture. So much other ‘musical symbolism’ going on, it hardly seems possible these are arbitrarily included.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prelude</th>
<th>Fugue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In the key of Eb: 3 flats!</td>
<td>In the key of Eb: 3 flats!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relatively free</td>
<td>Very strict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the modern and grand ‘<em>style galant</em>’</td>
<td>In a traditional and more austere ‘<em>stile antico</em>’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Earthly”</td>
<td>“Heavenly”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dante’s <em>Paradisio</em>?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Prelude
Themes in the Prelude:
‘Father’

Theme 1: a “French Overture”
Themes in the Prelude: ‘Son’

In both the Prelude and the Fugue:

• The ‘Son’ gets two musical approaches (divine vs. human?), Father & Spirit only one.

• The “Son” sections never use pedals (‘Father’ & ‘Spirit’ always do)
Themes in the Prelude: ‘Son’

Theme 2a: the ‘Son’ (‘Son of God’?)
- “Begotten of the Father” (related themes!)
- In the Father’s image. (Or ‘obedient’?)
- Full of grace(?)

\[\text{Musical notation image}\]
Themes in the Prelude (2b)

Theme 2b: the ‘Son’ (‘Son of Humanity’?)

1.

2.

Two connected musical ideas:

1. *Alla Zoppa* = ‘Struggle/Battle’
2. Angular, chromatic & syncopated = ‘Suffering’
Themes in the Prelude: ‘Holy Spirit’

• “Proceeds from the Father and the Son”: ‘Father’ notes and ‘Son’ rhythm
• The Holy Spirit: “descending, flickering like tongues of fire.”
The Fugue
The ‘Father’ Fugue

- The opening of the ‘St. Anne’ hymn tune
- The hymn tune was written in England by William Croft in 1708, organist of the church of St. Anne
- If Bach knew of the hymn, we don’t know how.
The ‘Son’ Fugue

- The only fugue that goes to minor keys
- Again, no pedal
- Two parts:
  - 22 bars + 1 bar + 22 bars
1. ‘Son’ theme + its inversion
2. ‘Son’ theme + ‘Father’ theme
‘Son’ Fugue Part 1 (human?)
Son Fugue Part 2 (divine?)
‘Holy Spirit’ Fugue

• The ‘dance form’ is…

• The 2nd theme is…
## Putting it all together

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>No. of Bars</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Father</td>
<td>36 = (3 x 3) x 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Son</td>
<td>45 = (3 x 3) x 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holy Spirit</td>
<td>36 = (3 x 3) x 4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Putting it all together (2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THEME:</th>
<th>SECTION:</th>
<th>Father</th>
<th>Son</th>
<th>Spirit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Father</td>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Son</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spirit</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

 <= WHY?
Conclusion

• No one can ‘hear’ all this symbolism and structure

• In Bach’s theology (and ours): Behind the visible (and audible) world there’s an Unseen Order beyond our comprehension.

~ The End ~
The St. Anne Prelude as published in 1739