Organ Improvisation in Context:

Historical and Practical Influences on the Craft of Improvisation at the Organ

by

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ABSTRACT

The craft of improvisation at the organ has survived a long period of dormancy and is experiencing a strong resurgence in the twenty-first century. This project seeks to establish a precedence for the value of notated music as a resource in learning improvisation, and then, through music analysis, provide examples of how that process can develop. The result of the ideas presented here is a pathway whereby any disciplined organist can learn to imitate composed music, assimilate the musical ideas, and innovate through the act of spontaneous improvisation.

DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to my Papa, Bill Howard, whose love and foresight made it possible.

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This project is a result of the countless individuals who have supported and impacted my life and music. Although I can not list everyone here, my thanks is ardent and I give it fully.

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INTRODUCTION

After an extended dormancy, the art of keyboard improvisation is beginning to reemerge as a valuable skill for organists to develop. If this resurgence is to continue it will be important to have a clear understanding of what it means to improvise and how to learn it. Simple dictionary definitions such as “to perform without preparation” are too vague. While it flatters a performer to focus on the term “without preparation,” I suggest that true and inspired improvisation is actually defined by spontaneity. In my experience as a listener and player, convincing improvisation is never unprepared musical ramblings, but rather a complete idea based in knowledge of harmonization, technique, musical form, and musical idioms such as motive, rhythm, and meter. A musician proficient in these elements can effortlessly offer a spontaneous, fluent, and personal performance of improvisation.

Prior to about 1900, improvisation played a central role in keyboard performance, bringing variety and excitement to both concerts and religious services. Many contemporary players, however, cannot improvise at all. It is unlikely that the decline in organ improvisation is a result of inferior abilities. Rather, it is more likely due to a variety of factors including a lack of formalized instruction in modern schools of music and conservatories, the abundance of inexpensive printed music, and changing liturgical expectations.

Historically, improvisation was the main focus of keyboard instruction at the best schools. An example of this focus comes from the Prague Organ School as late as the nineteenth-century. Two well-known directors of the school at that time, Karel Pitsch and Josef Foerster, required all students to develop skills in improvisation, and "if a student failed in improvisation…he was unable to remain at the school."[1]

Looking further back in history, one can assume that improvisation played a more prominent role for functioning musicians due to the difficulty and expense of obtaining written or printed music. Gerhard Krapf supports this observation in the introduction to his improvisation method:

> The sparcity of early collections of organ music as well as the didactic character of such sources as Paumann's or Buchner's *Fundamenta* suggests that the larger part of organistic practice during the fifteenth and sixteenth-centuries was improvisation. Even during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries when manuscript collections and printed music had become commonplace, improvisation was considered an indispensable facet of an organist's training.[2]

Improvisation required keyboard players to have a thorough knowledge of musical mechanics, enabling them to produce the enormous amounts of music required in religious and courtly settings.

The role of improvisation for keyboard musicians adapted to changing religious and cultural climates. During the eighteenth-century in Europe, for instance, the primary function of an organist/keyboardist was liturgical. The German Lutheran service in particular demanded proficiency in the art of chorale-based improvisation. In his introduction to the *Orgelbüchlein,* Bach explained the book's purpose, to give guidance to "a beginning organist … in developing a chorale in many different ways."[3] This instructional purpose was directly related to the need for organists of that time to improvise in accordance with the needs of the church service.

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[1] Jaroslav Vodrážka, *Organ Improvisation,* trans. Joy Moss-Kohoutová (Prague: Vydal Supraphon, 1988), 5.

[2] Gerhard Krapf, *Organ Improvisation: A Practical Approach to Chorale Elaborations for the Service* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1967), 17.

By the late eighteenth century, there was a noticeable shift in the professional demands on keyboard musicians. Fashions had moved away from the dominance of church music; consequently Mozart was mainly involved with concert and court music, composing almost nothing for the organ. Improvisation had also moved in new directions, and "liturgical improvisation was gradually displaced by an admittedly extra-liturgical type of dazzling concert extemporizing."[4] Mozart was known to be a gifted improviser and seemed to resent the new and seemingly less disciplined trends. In a letter written to his father on December 18, 1777, he comments on the improvisations of Georg Joseph Vogler, a famous popular musician:

> He is no more than a trickster. The instant he attempts to play in a somewhat dignified manner, he gets dry. One is relieved that he becomes

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[3] Johann Sebastian Bach, *Orbelbüchlein,* prepared and ed. Robert Clark and John David Peterson (St. Louis: Concordia, 1984), 23.

[4] Krapf, 17.

> impatient with it and cuts it short. But what follows after that? -an unintelligible babbling.[5]

Vogler's rambling improvisations pandered to the tastes of the public, exploiting keyboard virtuosity and special effects to entertain his listeners. A similar approach to improvisation prevailed in the nineteenth century, as heard in performances by Louis James Alfred Lefébure-Wely, whose dramatic themes included the improvisation of a "Voyage at Sea."[6] Ultimately, the shallowness of such improvisations when confronted with an ever growing body of notated repertoire led to a realignment of priorities in training organists. Although improvisation was never completely abandoned, especially in church music curricula, much greater emphasis was put on interpreting literature in American organ programs of the twentieth century. This resulted in the loss of creative skills once vital to all organists.

This project provides ideas for reclaiming the heritage of improvisation at the organ. A growing number of organists today are working to nurture their creativity through grounded methodical approaches to creating music extemporaneously. By analyzing and then imitating historical models, they and their students are able to prepare for improvising in different genres and contexts. The following chapters build upon these model-based approaches to explore improvisation. The opening chapter unveils underlying assumptions concerning notation and composition. Its subtitle, “Imitate, Assimilate and Innovate,” refers to a three-step process that ultimately is the foundation for creating most music, either through improvisation or composition. Chapter 2 explores notation and how music preserved in this way can serve as a model for the modern musician. To help organists establish a harmonic framework for their improvisations, Chapter 3 documents the harmonizing method used by Sietze de Vries, a leading contemporary improviser. Following the assimilation of this harmonic foundation, the reader is ready to adopt specific models in formulating plans for improvisation. The remaining chapters offer analyses of organ works from the 17th-20th centuries, demonstrating how they can serve to inspire improvisation by modern organists. Although pedagogical emphasis on interpreting written compositions has undeniably undermined the art of improvisation, the models preserved in notated repertoire for the organ provide a key to reviving it. The harmonic, theoretic and formulaic building blocks presented here are intended as first steps towards encouraging the renewal of extemporized practice at the organ.

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[5] Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, letter to his father, Mannheim, Germany, 18 Dec 1777, quoted in Krapf, n1.

[6] Louis James Alfred Lefébure-Wely, as described in a letter to Cavaillé-Coll, quoted in Fenner Douglass, *Cavaillé-Coll and the Musicians* (US: Sunbury, 1980), 1:110.

CHAPTER 1

A RENAISSANCE IN THE ART OF ORGAN IMPROVISATION: IMITATE, ASSIMILATE AND INNOVATE

For many modern organists, the art of improvisation is a vague and often terrifying subject. Regarding this intriguing and neglected topic, it is possible to argue the amount of perceived mystery relates directly to musicians' misunderstanding of what it means to improvise. The following list from the introduction of Bruno Nettl's book *In the Course of Performance* is one attempt to bring clarity to the concept of improvisation from a musicological perspective:

> 1) (Improvisation is) something definitely distinct from performance and precomposition,
> 2) imitation of precomposition with the helping hand of notation withdrawn,
> 3) the essence of composition where there is aural transmission,
> 4) an art at which the great composers particularly excelled,
> 5) a craft but not an art,
> 6) something to be evaluated along the same lines as composition,
> 7) a process that cannot be explained or analyzed, and
> 8) a kind of music making that sets apart the musical cultures outside the Western art music establishment.[7]

These ideas are simply a reportage of several viewpoints, and my experience with improvisation conflicts with several of them (number seven in particular). Ultimately, this list is valuable because it provides a starting point from which any musician can create a realistic definition of improvisation as it relates to field.

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[7] Bruno Nettl, "Introduction," in *In the Course of Performance: Studies in the World of Musical Improvisation,* ed. Bruno Nettl and Melinda Russell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 12.

For my instrument, the organ, there exists a long and rich history of improvisation. Until recently, the ability to improvise was expected of all competent organists. A major motivating factor in my quest to renew this expectation is a desire to reconnect with the once thriving tradition. I believe that improvisation is the way for modern players to continue a valuable legacy while simultaneously contributing their own ideas. Furthermore, because the improviser is culturally connected to the audience, a bridge is created between the music and the modern listener. This leads to wider appreciation for the art, as in many world music traditions. Stephen Blum observes in "Recognizing Improvisation" that improvisation's "importance in ethnomusicology stems from the fact that performers in so many cultures are expected to respond appropriately to 'unforeseen' challenges and opportunities" and in this way they can "enhance the moment and situation."[8]

But how is this possible for those musicians who are trained only to reproduce notated music? For me, the answer has grown out of experiments with improvisation that help satisfy my desire to achieve personal creativity in music. Through these experiments I have begun to establish a methodology for refining my improvisations. I have found tremendous insight from musical styles outside of traditional Western art music training.

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[8] Stephen Blum, "Recognizing Improvisation," in *In the Course of Performance: Studies in the World of Musical Improvisation,* ed. Bruno Nettl and Melinda Russell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 27.

The single most significant insight I have encountered comes from the field of American jazz. In October of 2007 I had a conversation with Michael Kocour, a gifted educator of improvisation who also maintains an active career as a performer on piano and jazz organ. Currently, Kocour is the Director of Jazz Studies in the School of Music at Arizona State University, and his jazz improvisation course is popular with students from every musical discipline in part due to his encouraging and supportive teaching style. Kocour believes that anyone can improvise and utilizes a concise philosophy for encouraging student creativity. This is the three-step process of Clark Terry, one of the most famous jazz trumpeters of the twentieth-century. Terry states that students of improvisation must learn to “imitate, assimilate, (and) innovate.”[9]

This basic idea exists in various forms for all music traditions I have researched. It is very evident in my own traditional training in Dutch organ improvisation. Although not articulated as such, Dutch improvisers place high value on imitating, assimilating and innovating upon the ideas found in historic compositions. This approach provides an important link between the lavish and sophisticated organ playing of the past and today’s players, as well as empowering them to play the organ in a more culturally relevant way.

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[9] Michael Kocour, interview by author in Tempe, AZ (10 October 2007), transcription in author’s collection.

Is There Value in Using Western Art Music Compositions as Improvisation Models?

Considerable effort is necessary to learn how to improvise in any musical style, so it is logical to assume that the model for improvisation must be worthy of emulation. Western art music provides an abundance of improvisation models, but it is important to consider whether or not this genre is still relevant.

Christopher Small makes the point that in light of modern ideals that tend to focus on progress and advancement, it is odd "that an entire musical culture should be based on musical works that have survived from the past."[10] Later he presents an interesting theory as to why Western art music and its great composers are so venerated: prolific composers of the past and their music have been elevated to a mythical status of cultural heroism, if for no other reason than that their significant achievements are so enviable. "The dead culture heroes are summoned up in order to give reassurance that the relationships they encoded in musical sounds are abiding and permanent, that things are as they have been and will not change."[11]

Not only is Small's mythological view compelling, it also gives insight into the abiding appeal of Western art music. Whether or not one feels his observation is accurate, this music is still widely appreciated for its complexity, beauty, and subtlety, which is already a strong reason to emulate it through improvisation. Furthermore, improvising in the genres of Western art music brings a possible advantage of stimulating the masses with their “mythical” placebo while simultaneously allowing for a performer’s personal expression.

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[10] Christopher Small, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performance and Listening* (Hanover and London: The University Press of New England, 1998), 87.

[11] Small, 90.

The Importance of a Notated Legacy From Which to Model

Bruno Nettl, a prominent ethnomusicologist, articulates a fear that the inevitable result of notation-based classical music training common in modern schools and conservatories is a “sacrifice (of) independence and personal opinion.”[12] However, if musicians not only interpret notation but also study the ideologies and techniques of a composition, they can internalize and emulate its legacy through improvisation. For this reason, notated compositions are an invaluable window into the mind of musicians who have been dead for centuries.

The advantage of having a palpable legacy from which to study, learn and perfect styles and ideas cannot be overstated. An excellent example is seen in the northern Europe tradition of organ improvisation that began during the baroque era. Regrettably, very little historic literature describes a process for learning to improvise. However, there is a large repertoire of compositions, and William Porter, an American organist known for his historically modeled improvisation, describes these as “simply the most sophisticated expressions of a musical language that allowed more modest musicians to (also) create music of fine craftsmanship...”[13] Porter believes that, just as in the past, diligent study of master works with the goal of adapting them as improvisation models, allows any player to quickly progress from very basic imitation to presenting innovative and spontaneous in-performance compositions.

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[12] Bruno Nettl, *Heartland Excursions: Ethnomusicological Reflections on Schools of Music* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 42.

Unfortunately, the availability and preeminence of modern notation often handicaps performing creativity and, in some cases, has come to be more important than individualized musical expression. Nicholas Cook, writing about *Music as Performance,* uses the statements of two well-known modern composers, Stravinsky and Schoenberg, to highlight the current supremacy of notation over interpretation. According to Stravinsky, “music should be executed and not interpreted,” and in Schoenberg’s case “that the performer was ‘totally unnecessary except as his interpretations make the music understandable to an audience unfortunate enough not to be able to read it in print.’”[14] Despite elements of sarcasm, these statements both emphasize Cook’s later observation of an “extraordinary illusion - for that is what it is - that there is such a thing as music, rather than simply acts of making and receiving it.”[15]

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[13] William Porter, “Hamburg Organists in Lutheran Worship,” in *The Organ as a Mirror of Its Time: North European Reflections, 1610-2000,* ed. Kerala J. Snyder (New York: Oxford, 2002), 74.

[14] Nicholas Cook, “Music as Performance,” in *The Cultural Study of Music: A Critical Introduction,* ed. Martin Clayton, Trevor Herbert and Richard Middleton (New York, London: Routledge, 2003), 204.

[15] Cook, 208.

A Method to Our Madness - What We Can Learn from World Music Traditions?

One of the most formidable challenges to improvising in any tradition is to find a starting point. In the world of organ improvisation, many improvisers are reluctant to reveal their "tricks" to students, stating that "you either have the talent for it or not." I personally spent many years believing this to be true and have only recently overcome that dangerous mental block and started improvising. I now have basic starting ideas from my improvisation teacher in the Netherlands, Sietze de Vries, and these shape my opinion that talent is merely a measure of how quickly someone learns rather than of what they may or may not be capable. De Vries's belief, shared when I first began lessons with him in November 2005, is that "good improvisation is only 10% inspiration and 90% effort."[16] This concept is backed by his specific models, examples, and methods that build on each other in creating a foundation for improvisation.

Similar ideas are echoed in the philosophies of Jazz instructors. One example comes from Mark Levine in the introduction to *The Jazz Theory Book*. He writes that "a great jazz solo consists of: 1% magic, 99% stuff that is explainable, analyzable, categorizable, and doable."[17]

Once the decision is made to learn how to improvise, however, there is the challenge of where to begin. My initial studies of several musical traditions that utilize improvisation reinforce the three-tiered model-based ideology of "imitate-assimilate-innovate." One example comes from a description of model-based improvisation by R. Anderson Sutton, entitled "Improvisation by Javanese Gamelan Musicians." This provides an excellent summary of the basic mentality necessary for good improvisation; although Sutton refers to Javanese Gamelan in this excerpt, I believe the idea is transferable to other traditions:

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[16] Sietze de Vries, organ studio lessons in Ommen and Uithhuizen, Netherlands (November 2005-August 2007), transcription in author's collection.

[17] Mark Levine, *The Jazz Theory Book* (Petaluma, CA: Sher Music, 1995), vii.

> The successful improviser demonstrates knowledge of the model, correspondence with the model at points of reference with a frequency expected within the tradition, and with an appropriate degree of inventiveness. This inventiveness may be evident in the choice of 'building blocks' or musical 'formulas,' and in the manipulation and alteration of these units from one instance to the next. Musical improvisation, then, is not free expression constrained only by the inspiration of the moment, but a complex and multilevel process, one that must be learned and practiced.[18]

Western trained musicians can achieve similar success by practicing improvisation with the model-based approach outlined below.

1. Imitation

A key component at the beginning stages of learning any musical tradition is the desire to learn what is observed. Benjamin Brinner asks a basic question that any appreciative observer of a master musician considers, "How do they do what they do?"[19] If cultivated, this initial wonder leads the way for studying.

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[18] R. Anderson Sutton, "Do Javanese Gamelan Musicians Really Improvise," in *In the Course of Performance: Studies in the World of Musical Improvisation,* ed. Bruno Nettl and Melinda Russell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 71.

[19] Benjamin Brinner, *Knowing Music, Making Music: Javanese Gamelan And The Theory of Musical Competence And Interaction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 3.

Once a student is committed to the process it is important to connect with other practitioners. Brinner's introduction highlights the importance of outside influence for developing musicians:

> A person may study and practice alone for hours on end, but certain aspects of musical practice can be absorbed and developed only through interaction with other musicians as a student, a peer, a follower or leader in an ensemble, even as a rival in a solo tradition.[20]

My own experience with improvisation is a reinforcement of Brinner's idea. I became interested in studying with de Vries during a live performance, and I continued to be inspired through hearing his church service playing, master classes, and recordings. This led to a desire to imitate what he was doing and prompted me to pursue one-on-one lessons. In my first lessons he played inspiring examples beyond my immediate capability, and then I began the process of imitating those examples.

2. Assimilation

Assimilation is the natural result of imitation. In my case, de Vries's method of instruction provided a framework that was easily transferred to any music. The system begins by strictly harmonizing melodies in four parts to gain proficiency in that musical language and its rules. From there the expert gives basic modeled forms that must be imitated exactly in length and progression, but are transposed and harmonically adapted to different melodies. Finally, the student must find compositions to break down through analysis. The goal of this process is to assimilate a set of tools in the given style that can be utilized during the course of an improvisation. Another way of describing this process is to compare it with learning to read a language. A person first learns the alphabet and then how the letters are combined to form words. Next they are able to create words that describe things, and eventually they learn to combine many words in various ways to communicate unique ideas.

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[20] Brinner, 3.

A similar process appears in Javanese music as described by Brinner. He observed an unprepared performance by a prominent Central Java singer, Tukinem, in which she "followed the *rebab* melody, drawing on her large stock of vocal phrases and texts as well as her knowledge of how these phrases correspond to *rebab* melodies and to the forms of Javanese music."[21] Clearly, she had a mastery over the musical ideas of Central Javanese music and could easily draw on her knowledge to construct meaningful and appropriate music within that framework.

3. Innovation

Tukinem's abilities go beyond a basic assimilation of the musical components she had previously learned, however. She was using her knowledge to imbue her performance with a character unique to her. This is the sign of true musical and improvisatory mastery.

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[21] Brinner, 14.

Steven Blum describes a Near Eastern definition of musical art that reinforces the progression from observation to innovation. The fourth century approach in al-Fārābi's *Kitāb al-mūsiqi al-kabir* describes a three-stage progression that incorporates relationships between sense perception, imagination, and reasoning in each stage.[22] In al-Fārābi's model, the third and highest stage of musical competence is innovative and is comprised of musicians with an ability to give not only imaginative performances but also to be "capable of stating their reasons for each decision."[23] Such abilities are only possible when the players have complete physical and intellectual control over their music making.

In my own playing I have begun to experience a new level of mastery that I believe is directly related to a systematic practice of improvisation. This expertise is manifest in two ways: first, my performance of composed works is easier and more rewarding due to faster comprehension of the composer's ideas and an ability to make musical decisions in performance. Second, I am now able to perform complete improvisations with coherent design from beginning to end.

Conclusion

Most Western trained musicians, and organists in particular, are given little or no instruction in improvisation. This unfortunately reality inhibits their ability to fully comprehend the musical styles they perform, and it also contributes to a widening gap between performer and audience. Western art music has a long and sophisticated history of composition, and in order to avoid allowing this notated benefaction to block personal creativity, modern musicians should draw from the countless ideas preserved in composed repertoire to enrich their improvisations.

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[22] Brinner, 33.

[23] Blum, 33.

As an organist I often find myself struggling with the challenge of presenting concerts accessible to general audiences while still playing the refined music I have worked hard to master. Incorporating improvisation in a performance is one way to help overcome this barrier. Just as in other world traditions, improvisation allows me to adapt to the audience's response and better keep their attention by using melodies with which they are familiar. In addition to presenting a relevant concert, improvising in a style similar to the compositions I perform creates better understanding of the music and its original context.

Other world music traditions have shown that improvising is a way to enhance musicianship beyond the printed page and to connect audiences with music. Likewise, Western musicians who move beyond notation and try to internalize ideas from the repertoire they are learning will find that improvisation is not as difficult as it once seemed. They will discover that improving harmonic vocabulary and structural knowledge based on relevant composed models is the key to simultaneously sustaining the cultural legacy of their art while maintaining creative independence.

CHAPTER 2

THE REVIVAL OF NOTATIONAL RELEVANCE THROUGH MODEL BASED IMPROVISATION

With few exceptions, American and European classically trained musicians rely exclusively on the printed musical notation of established compositions for their performances. Bruno Nettl, in his book *Heartland Excursions: Ethnomusicological Reflections on Schools of Music*, clearly articulates the extent of this phenomenon with the bold statement that "music to Music Building society is *notated* music."[24] Consequently, many modern musicians, myself included, do not immediately realize that notation in its current form has not always existed or that performance without the aid of a score is possible.

It would, however, be irresponsible to discount the tremendous advantage that musical notation brings. Nettl himself concedes that "notation is necessary for the coordination of forces in complex ensembles, essential to the development of complex musical relationships."[25] However, I would like to suggest that, especially in the case of an individual performer, the skill of improvisation is equally important as his or her ability to realize a notated composition. Furthermore, this skill is the answer to the potential "sacrifice (of) independence and personal opinion"[26] that some fear is an inevitable result of the classical music training common to modern schools of music and conservatories.

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[24] Bruno Nettl, *Heartland Excursions: Ethnomusicological Reflections on Schools of Music* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 36.

[25] Nettl, 37.

Legitimizing Musical Opulence

Considerable effort is necessary to learn how to improvise in any musical style, so it is logical to assume that the model for improvisation must be worthy of emulation. Western Art Music provides an abundance of improvisation models, but it is important to consider whether or not this genre is still relevant.

Christopher Small makes the point in his book *Musicking: The Meanings of Performance and Listening* that in light of modern ideals which tend to focus on progress and advancement it is odd "that an entire musical culture should be based on musical works that have survived from the past".[27] Later he presents an interesting theory as to why Western Art Music and its great composers are so venerated: prolific composers of the past and their music have been elevated to a mythical status of cultural heroism, if for no other reason than that their tremendous achievements are so enviable. "The dead culture heroes are summoned up in order to give reassurance that the relationships they encoded in musical sounds are abiding and permanent, that things are as they have been and will not change."[28]

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[26] Nettl, 42.

[27] Christopher Small, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performance and Listening* (Hanover and London: The University Press of New England, 1998), 87.

[28] Small, 90.

Not only is this mythological view compelling, it also gives insight into the abiding appeal of Western Art Music. Whether or not one feels Small's observation is accurate, the simple fact remains that this music is still widely appreciated giving a strong argument for its relevance. In addition, improvising in genres of Western art music brings a possible advantage of stimulating the masses with their "mythical" placebo while simultaneously allowing for the performer's personal expression.

A Fallacious Perception of Notation

A key component of improvisation is having an easily imitated model so a performer can assimilate the ideas and then personalize them. For this reason notated compositions are an invaluable window into the mind of long dead musicians. The advantage of having a palpable legacy from which to study, learn and perfect styles and ideas cannot be overstated.

Unfortunately, the availability and preeminence of modern notation often handicaps performing creativity and, in some cases, has come to be more important than individualized musical expression. Nicholas Cook, writing about *Music as Performance,* uses the statements of two well known modern composers, Stravinsky and Schoenberg, to highlight the current supremacy of notation over interpretation. According to Stravinsky, "music should be executed and not interpreted," and in Schoenberg's case "… the performer was 'totally unnecessary except as his interpretations make the music understandable to an audience unfortunate enough not to be able to read it in print.'"[29] These statements both emphasize Cook's later observation of an "extraordinary illusion - for that is what it is - that there is such a thing as music, rather than simply acts of making and receiving it."[30]

Improvisation As Language

According to Cook, the shifted perception of notation as something in itself is partly due to "musicology's origins as a nineteenth-century discipline modeled on philology, and therefore treating music as a written text."[31] Even though he is pointing out how this view is taken too far, some merit can be found in drawing parallels between music and language. A new paradigm is created when notation is not thought of as simply the text to a dead language, but rather as "script" of "real-time" in a living language.[32]

Thorough emersion into the rules and harmonies of any subset of Western Art Music opens the door to its "grammatical" structure, and over time the performer is able to string together short sections of musical ideas into coherent sentences. They are thus able to make unique statements in a language appreciated by general audiences.

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[29] Nicholas Cook, "Music as Performance," in *The Cultural Study of Music: A Critical Introduction,* ed. Martin Clayton, Trevor Herbert and Richard Middleton (New York, London: Routledge, 2003), 204.

[30] Cook, 208.

[31] Cook, 204.

[32] Cook, 206.

Considering musical notation as a language can also help to harmonize the four types of musical transmission that Nettl lists: “aural” with its partner “written music,” and “recorded” with its partner “printed music.”[33] The first two types of transmission are often neglected in Western Art Music, but are the most important to develop for successful improvisation. The second pair are the manifestations of the modern notational paradigm and are consequently much more common.

Significant versatility and virtuosity is achieved when these methods of musical transmission work together. One example comes from the era of great composers who are so esteemed in Western Art Music:

> Mozart, beloved and mysterious among composers, is seen as the “supreme genius of music” in some measure because he could free himself from these [notational] constraints and make music that moved directly from his mind to the keyboard, showing that if need be, he could chuck it all and produce his music without notation.[34]

Conclusion: Fluency in Music

It is important to question the current legitimacy of Western Art Music as Cook, Small, and Nettl have done. Through this process of examination “we are exploring, affirming and celebrating concepts of relationships that we feel to be desirable”[35] in our cultural context. But, after identifying the issues of notational dependency confronting modern Western musicians, it is important to find resolution to the problems raised. For many musicians, a dual need exists to perform for appreciative audiences as well as to be individually creative. As Cook observes, these needs arise because “through (music) we perform social meaning.”[36]

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[33] Nettl, 37.

[34] Nettl, 38.

[35] Small, 93.

I believe that by improving harmonic vocabulary and structural knowledge based on relevant models, musicians can simultaneously sustain the legacy entrusted them while maintaining their creative independence. Improvisation is the key to unchaining musicianship from the printed page and restoring notation to its rightful place as a useful part of a whole.

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[36] Cook, 213.

CHAPTER 3

HARMONIZATION AS A FOUNDATION OF IMPROVISATION: THE HARMONIZATION METHOD OF TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY IMPROVISER SIETZE DE VRIES

Before launching into the analysis of models for improvisation, the organist should understand how harmony functions. A developed harmonic vocabulary is the hallmark of most improvisers because it creates a solid base for creativity. Harmony serves as the foundation for most musical styles; by first acquiring facility in harmonizing melodies, the improviser can then focus on large-scale considerations of form and structure.

One excellent contemporary example of an improviser who teaches harmonization is Sietze de Vries, a prolific Dutch organist who rose to prominence after taking first prize in the Haarlem 2002 international organ improvisation competition. Although only in his mid-thirties, de Vries has already released several CDs of improvisation, including eight on his own label, JSB Records. He was the moving force behind a recently released DVD, CD and picture book documentary of the organs in the Groningen province of the Netherlands,[37] and he has authored a beginning harmonization method book.[38] In great demand as a concert artist and clinician, de Vries gives dozens of concerts and masterclasses each year. Especially striking is his enthusiasm for teaching improvisation to other organists.

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[37] Sietze de Vries, ed., *Pronkjuwelen in Stad en Ommeland: The Historic Organs of the Province of Groningen* (Veenhuizen, The Netherlands: Boeijenga Music, 2009).

[38] Sietze de Vries, *Harmonizing*, trans. Devon Howard (Veenhuizen, The Netherlands: Boeijenga Music, 2006).

Beginning Four-Part Harmonization in the Tonal Style

One of the first concepts de Vries stresses to new students is that anyone can improvise effectively because "improvisation is only ten-percent talent and ninety-percent effort."[39] A notable example of what this effort can accomplish, especially when coupled with a prodigious talent like that of de Vries, is the double fugue from his CD improvisations on Genevan Psalm melodies.[40]

When learning to improvise, organists must be able to assimilate theory and to think harmonically. Skilled improvisers in any genre are able to do this instinctively as a result of the time taken to study and learn the theory of the style they are improvising. The prolific jazz improviser, Mark Levine, explains that a "player is not thinking 'II-V-I,' 'blues lick,' 'AABA,' 'altered scale,' and so forth. He or she has done that already, many years ago."[41] Levine stresses that to be a great improviser a player will need a second nature understanding of the style they are improvising and an intimate connection with the mechanics of playing their instrument. These skills insure that the musician is liberated from cumbersome playing, shifting focus instead to the musical outcome of the improvisation.

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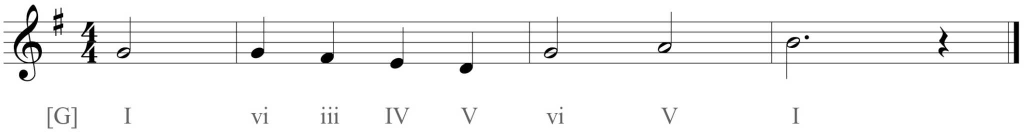
[39] Sietze de Vries, organ studio lessons in Ommen and Uithhuizen, Netherlands (November 2005-August 2007), transcription in author's collection.

[40] Sietze de Vries, *Geneefse Psalmen*, organ and choir, JSB Records JSBR010113, 2003, tr31.

[41] Mark Levine, *The Jazz Theory Book* (Petaluma, CA: Sher Music, 1995), vii.

Although de Vries specializes in formalized baroque improvisations, his philosophy is the same as Levine's, and he has developed an approach for harmonizing melodies on the organ. Despite its simplicity, the technique immediately produces a four-part texture that simultaneously develops the player's knowledge of tonal voice leading. In his harmonization book, de Vries asks students to take a melody line and assign triadic chords within the constraints of the tonic scale to each pitch. He then instructs students to play the three pitches of the triad in the right hand with the melody as the highest pitch and the chord root in the left; thus allowing for a full realization of the melody in four-part texture. Examples 1 and 2 illustrate how to accomplish this.

Example 1: First line of Psalm 134 (Old Hundredth) with one possible harmonization.[42]



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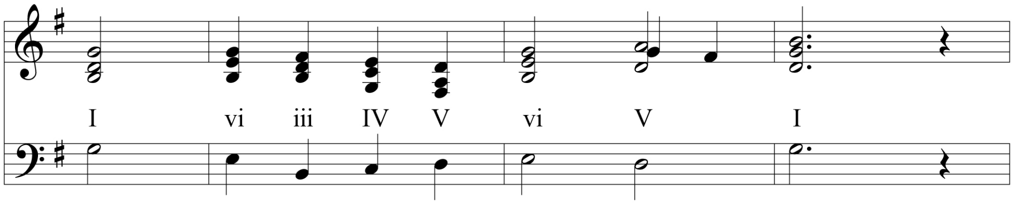
[42] Author's harmonization based on instruction from Sietze de Vries, Organ Studio Lessons.

Example 2: Full realization of the harmonization from Fig. 1 in four-part texture.[43]



De Vries's book, available through the Dutch music publisher, Boeijenga, offers a comprehensive approach to harmonization, taking the examples listed above as a point of departure. His ultimate goal is for the player to develop complete proficiency at harmonizing any melody in any voice range with strict four-part harmony and good voice leading. While this might at first seem a daunting task, his systematic approach makes the process easier.

Following is a ten-step harmonization method developed by the author as a result of direct instruction from de Vries. Each step provides structure for practice. This is not intended as a rigid system, but rather as a guide to increase proficiency in the language of tonal harmony. When a player can seamlessly take any melody through these ten steps in various keys, s/he will have mastered tonal harmonization and be well on the way to creating innovative improvisations.

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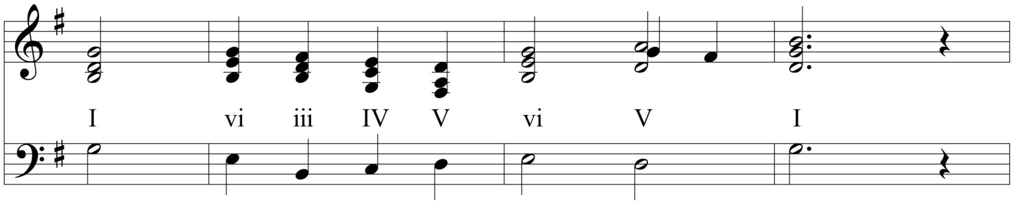
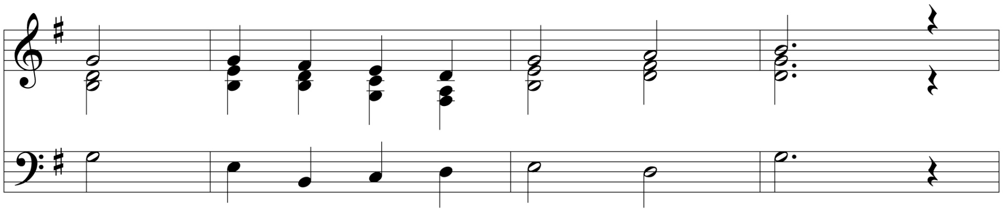
[43] Ibid.

Initially, it is important to use only the simplest harmonizations in root position (I, IV, and V chords). Beginning with basic chords allows for better awareness of the instrument as well as the development of the musical ear. With continued practice the organist will find more advanced possibilities emerging from this 10-step foundation, elucidated in the examples below. The same four pitches are used in each chord and are moved to different voices for each step.

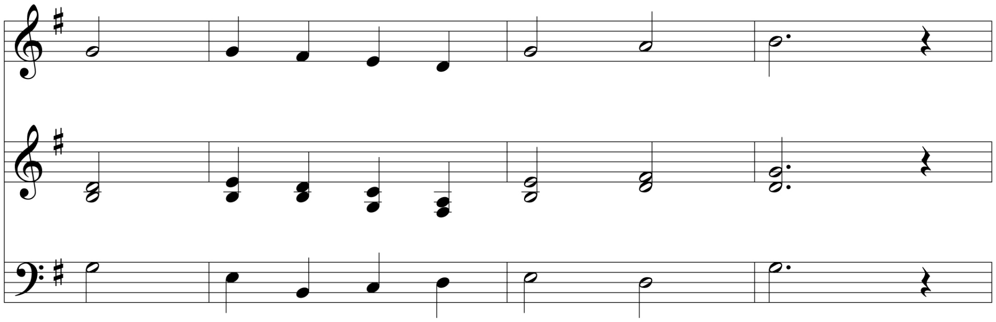
Step 1: Four-part Harmonization in Closed Position



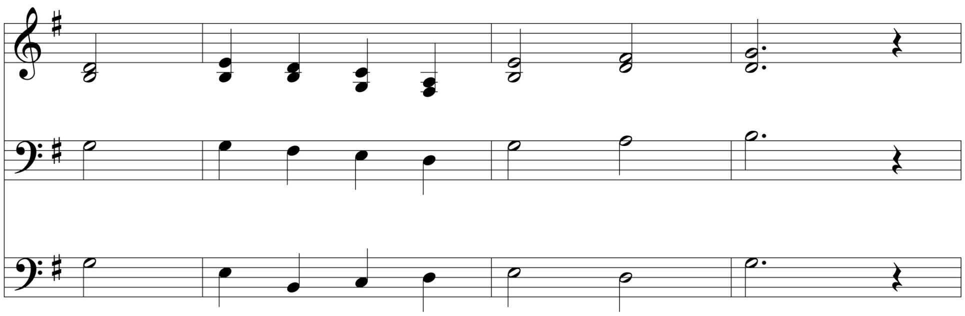
Step 2: Four-part Harmonization with Melody in the Soprano (right hand)



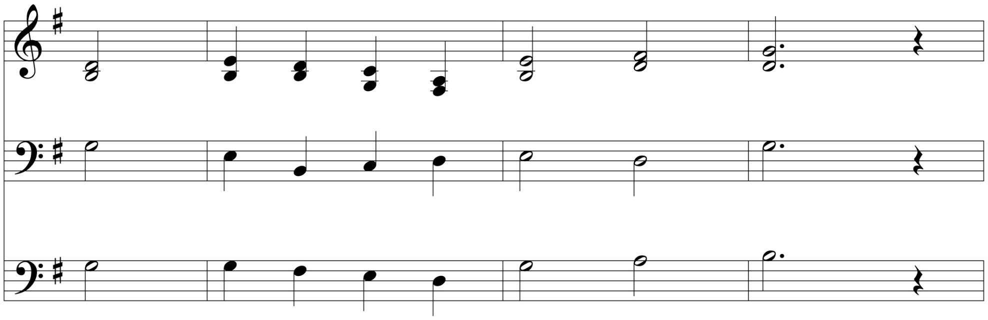
Step 3: Four-part Harmonization with Melody in the Soprano and Played on a Separate Manual



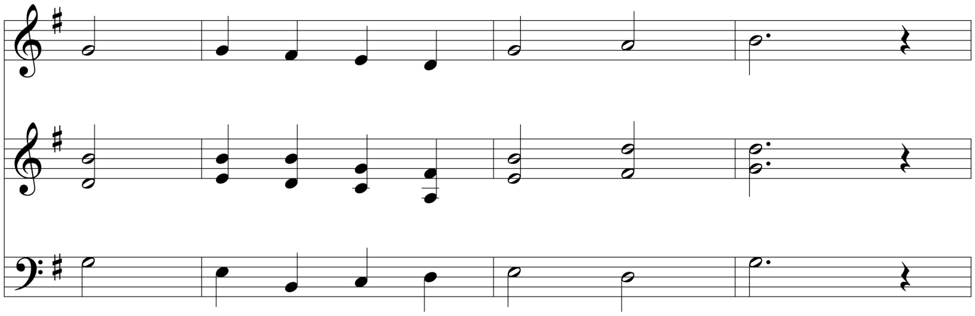
Step 4: Four-part Harmonization with Melody in Tenor (left hand)



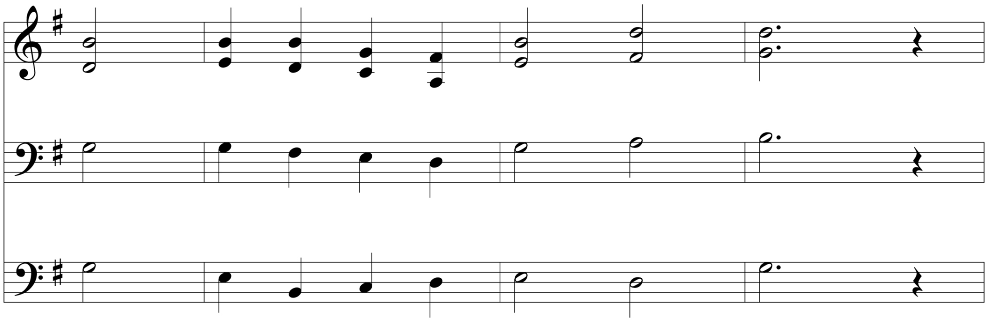
Step 5: Four-part Harmonization with Melody in Pedal (on a 2' or 4' stop)



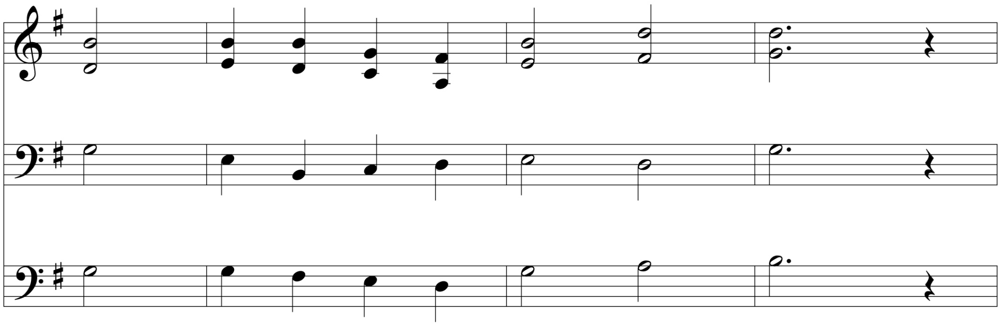
Step 6: Four-part Harmonization with Melody in Alto (right hand; open "sandwich" texture)



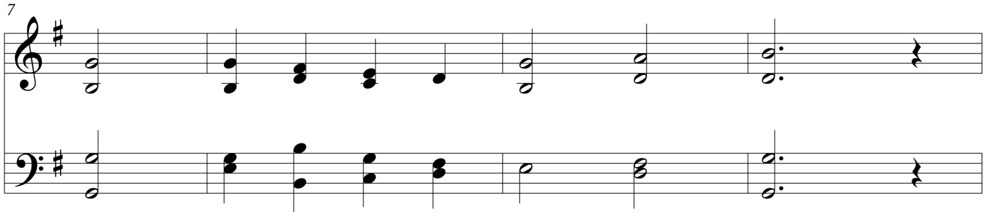
Step 7: Four-part Harmonization with Melody in Tenor (open "sandwich" texture)



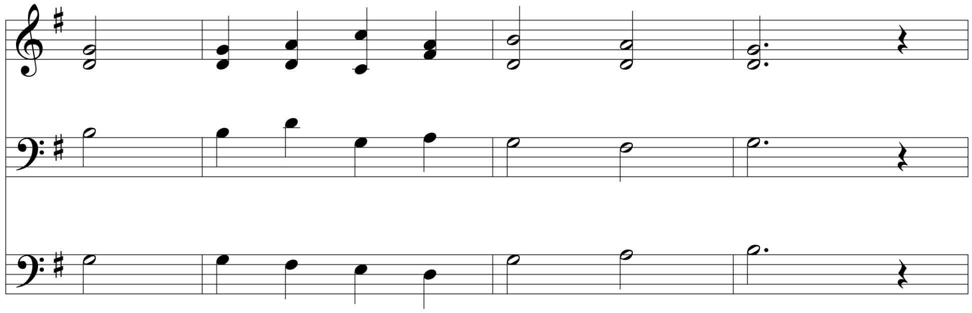
Step 8: Four-part Harmonization with Melody in Pedal (open "sandwich" texture)



Step 9: Open Four-part Harmonization with Two Voices in Each Hand; Melody in Soprano



Step 10: Four-part Harmonization with Melody in the Bass (pedal)

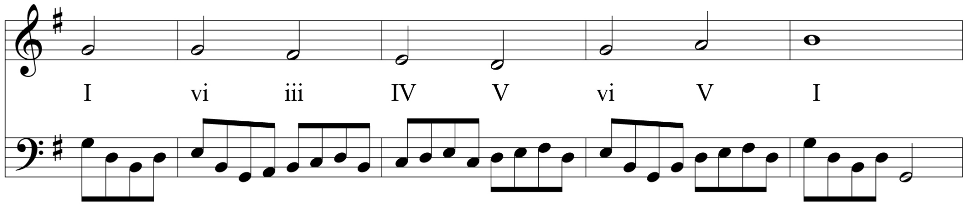


Once mastered, these steps will be valuable tools for improvisation, and they should be maintained through regular practice. It is also important to commit melodies to memory so that harmonizing and transposing them can be truly spontaneous. Being able to transpose a melody to any key is vital for versatility in improvisation. This should be reinforced through transposing the material practiced in the harmonization steps listed above. Playing double pedal, with both the chord root and melody played simultaneously by the feet, will also be easier after practicing the 10 steps.

From Harmonization to Improvisation

As a player develops harmonization abilities, s/he should simultaneously develop a diverse and thorough knowledge of stylistic musical forms. The two skills are symbiotic, each enhancing the other. An example of a basic form that naturally evolves out of the harmonization skills outlined above is the bicinium, a two voice texture containing only the melody and an accompaniment. (This technique is discussed further in Chapter 4.)

Example 3: Bicinium from the melody line in Example 1[44]



Notice that the melody notes have been put into equal note values and that the accompanying bass part plays the chosen root for each chord on the beat. As the player's harmonic vocabulary increases, s/he can also expand the bicinium idea to create trios, *basses de trompettes*, concertos, French overtures, and eventually fugues.

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[44] Author's bicinium based on instruction from Sietze de Vries, Organ Studio Lessons.

The following chapters contain analyses of compositions to serve as models for improvisation. The ideas proffered are meant to serve as a guide for personal exploration by an individual player. The importance of understanding harmonization and achieving fluency in the tonal language cannot be overstated. Skilled improvisers such as Sietze de Vries have demonstrated the importance of a systematic approach to harmonization. Just as one must learn words and sentence formation in order to speak a language, one must develop a harmonic vocabulary and use it within a musical structure in order to improvise.

CHAPTER 4

NORTH GERMAN *TE DEUM* SETTINGS AS MODELS FOR ORGAN IMPROVISATION

Improvisation has played a dominant role in the art of organ playing for much of the history of the instrument. This was especially the case in northern Germany during the baroque era. At this time the Lutheran tradition was firmly rooted in cultural centers such as Hamburg and Lübeck, and the theology of Lutheranism placed much importance on music's place in worship. In his essay on Lutheran organists in Hamburg, William Porter points out that a commonly held belief during the 17th century was that one participated in the divine life of heaven through music.[45] The important role of music naturally contributed to high expectations of both quantity and quality, especially from organists. These expectations, in addition to the technology and resources then available, make it unreasonable to assume that enough music could be composed on a day-to-day basis to fulfill the needs of church services. It was not only natural, but necessary, for organists to develop prodigious talent at improvisation in order to thrive in their liturgical roles.

A comprehensive discussion of the art of improvisation is beyond the scope of this chapter. But by focusing on one melody, the popular *Te Deum,* it is possible to assess the importance of improvisational practice to the creation of organ music in northern Germany. Alternatim use of the *Te Deum* naturally fostered improvisations; the tune's adaptability to compositional styles of the time also made it ideal for composed settings, and these in turn serve well as models for improvisation. The *Te Deum* melody was borrowed and adapted in many ways through the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and the high caliber of the surviving settings are a testament to its relevance both then and now.

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[45] William Porter, "Hamburg Organists in Lutheran Worship," in *The Organ as a Mirror of Its Time: North European Reflections, 1610-2000,* ed. Kerala J. Snyder (New York: Oxford, 2002), 60.

Brief History of the *Te Deum/Herr Gott, dich loben wir*

The *Te Deum* is a chant primarily sung at the end of the Divine Office service of Matins, an early morning vigil in the Roman Catholic Church held around three in the morning. Considered hymn of praise to God, it is also used in processions, at times of thanksgiving, or in moments of celebration such as the election of a new pope. The chant text contains twenty-nine verses and only one melody for this is known to exist.

Although the text of the *Te Deum* is well documented in medieval liturgical manuscripts, there is very little source material to suggest an origin for the melodic material. Scholars debate about the origin of the melody, but one version is particularly interesting to consider in light of improvisational use. The prevalent theory during the Middle Ages was that the *Te Deum* was improvised by St. Ambrose at the baptism of St. Augustine.[46] Although this rather romantic theory is probably apochryphal, it undoubtedly played a role in the spontaneous and joyful atmosphere associated with the *Te Deum*.

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[46] *Grove Music Online,* s.v. "Te Deum," http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/27618 (accessed April 22, 2008).

Due to the length of the *Te Deum* melody, it is necessary to break it down into single phrases to analyze the borrowed material. Justification for this approach comes from the prevalence of the *alternatim* practice between choir and organ in services. The *Te Deum* was performed in this manner, so that improvisations and/or compositions treated sections of the chant rather than the melody in its entirety. In his book *Organ Literature of the Seventeenth Century*, John Shannon acknowledges that using the organ in *alternatim* was a great avenue for bringing elaboration to "the simple chant without the forces and skill of a polyphonic choir" and helped the organ to find "a vital liturgical function."[47] Later generations were to benefit from the organ's role in *alternatim* practice, creating the great musical tradition of organ playing in northern Germany during the baroque era.

The *Te Deum* survived the reformation due to its adaptation into German by Martin Luther in 1529. Ann Bond lists the three versions of the hymn found in German primary sources that show its transformation from *Te Deum* to *Herr Gott, dich loben wir.* She lists occurrences of "(i) the complete Latin version; (ii) the same plainsong, with German prose translation; (iii) the plainsong adapted very neatly to fit Luther's rhyming-couplet translation."[48] In the following two examples showing the first phrases of the Latin version and Bach's setting, note the similarities in the melody despite decades of adaptation.

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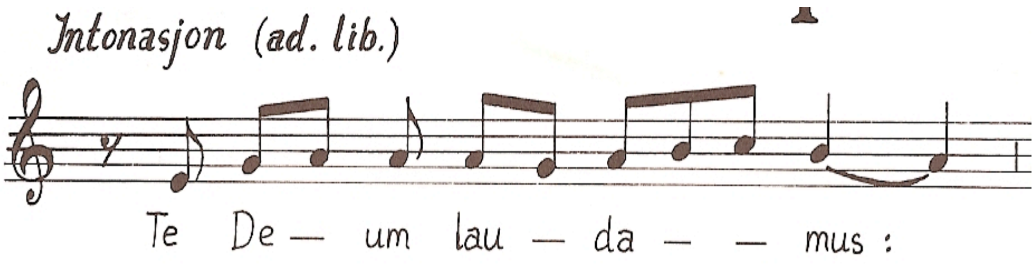
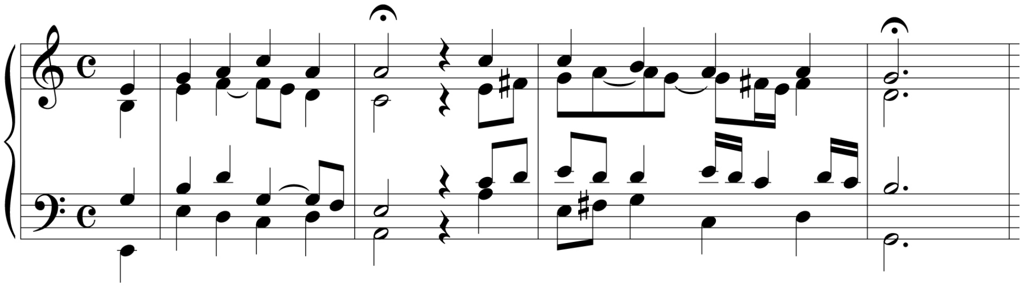
[47] John Shannon, "*Organ Literature of the Seventeenth Century: A Study of Its Styles* (Raleigh: The Sunbury Press, 1978), 29.

Example 1: Intonation of the Te Deum's opening phrase[49]



Example 2: Bach's setting of Herr Gott, dich loben wir[50]



The repeated A's of the chant have been condensed into one note in Bach's chorale setting, while the intermediary B's in the stepwise ascent to C and descent back to A have been omitted, retaining the contours of the original melody while simplifying it.

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[48] Ann Bond, "Plainsong in the Lutheran Church, 2: Organ Music, 1600-1750," *The Musical Times* 114, no.1 (October 1973): 995.

[49] Kjell Mørk Karlsen, *Te Deum: for organ* (Oslo: Norsk Muiskkforlag, 1978), 2.

[50] Johann Sebastian Bach, *The 371 Chorales of Johann Sebastian Bach,* ed. Frank D. Mainous and Robert W. Ottman (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966), 185.

Te Deum Compositions as Improvisation Models

An authoritative definition of improvisation is hard to establish because of the subjectivity of the art. However, a definition by Bruno Nettl is especially appropriate to the atmosphere of north German baroque composition in general, and to the *Te Deum* specifically. He writes that improvisation is “imitation of precomposition with the helping hand of notation withdrawn, (and) the essence of composition where there is aural transmission.”[51] My personal experience with improvisation supports these ideas by showing that without a solid understanding of form and musical language it is impossible to improvise convincingly.

The view of an improviser composing as they perform correlates to a lack of historical sources that explain how to improvise. Rather, we find a wealth of sources that teach detailed elements of composition with only a few passing references to the great amount of improvisation that took place. This can lead to two misconceptions as detailed by Porter: “the first of these is the belief that their improvised music making was totally spontaneous, without preparation; the second is the idea that improvisational “style” is somehow different from what is preserved in the written repertoire.”[52] Seen in this light, it makes sense that organists would study the art of composition to the point of internalization and thus be able to utilize the skill extemporaneously. A parallel can be drawn with learning to speak a language in the sense that an individual who increases their vocabulary and knowledge of grammar is better able to communicate effectively.

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[51] Bruno Nettl, “Introduction: An Art Neglected in Scholarship.” In *In the Course of Performance: Studies in the World of Musical Improvisation*, ed. Bruno Nettle and Melinda Russell (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 12.

[52] Porter, 68-69.

With these ideas in mind I will now look at four north German baroque organ compositions that use the *Te Deum* as a source. Based on my personal experience, I will attempt to describe how they function as models for improvisation. All of these compositions contain one or more of the five techniques for setting a *cantus firmus* (borrowed melody) that Shannon asserts first developed in vocal music and transitioned into instrumental use. Mastery of these basic compositional techniques provide a surprising wealth of possibilities as follows:

> 1) *cantus firmus* in long notes generally in the tenor or bass around which the other voices weave free counterpoint;
> 2) a soprano melody structured on the notes of the *cantus firmus* but with appropriate ornamental figuration. The melody can become so florid that its origins are obscured.
> *3)* use of the techniques of points of imitation. The themes are derived from the notes of the *cantus.*
> 4) the use of a technique similar to 1) above with the addition of counterpoint which itself is related to the *cantus;* and
> 5) combination of methods 1) and 3) wherein short initial imitations suggest the coming entrance of lines of the *cantus.*[53]

The first composition I will consider is a cimple four-part setting of the German version of the *Te Deum* by Samuel Scheidt. It is found in his *Görlitz*

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[53] Shannon, 29.

Organ Book of 1650 and contains the entire melody in 27 strophes.[54] The ability of an improviser to harmonize convincingly a tune in a set style is the foundation from which all other improvisations grow. Scheidt demonstrates what a refined harmonizer can accomplish through use of contrary motion, parallel thirds and sixths, passing tones, and harmonic variance on repeated melody notes. A beginner should only attempt to provide four voices that avoid parallel fifths and octaves, staying within the tonic key. This is easily accomplished by playing closed root position triads based on the melody note in the right hand and adding the root of the chord as a bass in the left.

The second composition is the chorale variation setting of *Herr Gott, dich loben wir* by Jacob Praetorius.[55] His version contains six short variations each taken from a different phrase of the hymn, and he uses several common compositional techniques. The first and fifth sections are fugal in nature with entries in all four voices. Both sections treat the first half of the phrase imitatively and state the second half of the phrase in the pedal with relatively homophonic textures in the manuals. The second and last variation place the melody in the highest voice on a solo registration where it is embellished and ornamented while the left hand and pedal provide harmonic support below. The third and fourth variations place the melody in the pedal with the hands filling in the other three voices above.

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[54] Samuel Schiedt, *The Görlitz Organ Book (1650): 100 Four-Part Chorales,* trans. Theo Front (New York: Edwin F. Kalmus, 1950), 90-95.

[55] Jacob Praetorius, *Choralbearbeitungen: for Organ,* ed. Werner Breig (Kassel, Germany: Bärenreiter, 1974), 12-16.

These settings by Praetorius are easily imitated in improvisation because of their simplicity. All of the variations are short and have limited harmonic changes. Also, because the melody is stated slowly and clearly, it is easy to choose a single triad to fit over each note. This concept is helpful to a beginning improviser by demonstrating forms that provide time to think directionally to arrival on the next note. As harmonic fluency progresses, more and more complex and fast-paced changes will be possible. Praetorius's variations are great examples of the types of variety available in simple harmonies through the use of figuration, ornamentation, and parallel thirds and sixths. Furthermore, his fugal treatments are very basic and limited to only four statements of the theme. The ability to create an exposition in this manner is the first step in progressing to a full fugue and will be discussed later.

Franz Tunder's chorale fantasia on *Herr Gott, Dich Loben Wir* is a much more complex composition based on the *Te Deum*.[56] Tunder sets the first half of Luther's melody, but his treatment is more masked in comparison to the previous examples. A side-by-side analysis of the work with Luther's melody reveals the ingenuity of Tunder's setting. He predominantly uses three techniques: an ornamented melody in the soprano, the *cantus firmus* in the pedal, and echos between two manuals with different registrations.

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[56] Franz Tunder, *Sämtliche Orgelwerke (Complete Organ Works),* ed. Klaus Beckmann (Wiesbaden, Germany: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1974), 40-47.

Although only an experienced improviser will be able to create a performance on the level of this work, there are important principles for improvisers of any level to learn from the piece. Most immediately recognizable is the ability to shift the melody to different voices so that it can function both as an ornamented melody and a *cantus firmus*. In the first 25 bars Tunder places it in the soprano, followed by the tenor, and finally in the bass. Each of these placements requires the player to think in different harmonic hierarchies, but once they have mastered that ability, more possibilities are at their disposal.

The first step in working towards this goal is for the player to solo the melody in different voice parts in simple four-part harmonizations. I have found it easiest to move the melody as a solo in the right hand while the left hand continues to plays the two inner parts and the pedal plays the bass line from the basic harmonization already practiced. The next step is to move the melody to the tenor line in the left hand while the right hand and pedal accompany with the other three parts. The final step is to put the melody in the pedal, realizing the need for a new harmonization because the melody is now the foundation.

A second element that Tunder demonstrates is echoing between two manuals. This technique can create variety in an improvisation without requiring much harmonic change. It also allows the player to utilize more of the unique timbres of whichever instrument they are playing. A significant portion of Tunder's *Herr Gott* employs echo effects that are rarely more complicated than a slightly ornamented phrase being repeated exactly on a second manual. The best way to practice this is to take a tune and simply repeat a harmonization of the opening phrase back and forth between two or even three manuals.

The final composition discussed here is Dietrich Buxtehude's refined *Te Deum laudamus*.[57] Like Praetorius, Buxtehude presents a series of variations based on selected phrases of the *Te Deum*. The composition begins with a freely composed *Praeludium* that serves to establish the key in much the same way as was done in *alternatim* traditions. Continuing over the course of four variations, the composer uses two-part bicinium texture, then places the *cantus firmus* in the bass, then adopts echos, and finally fugal imitation. Buxtehude makes triadic harmonies based on the melody easily identifiable, especially on down beats. The following examples from the *Te Deum laudamus* show how each of the improvisatory techniques are manifest.

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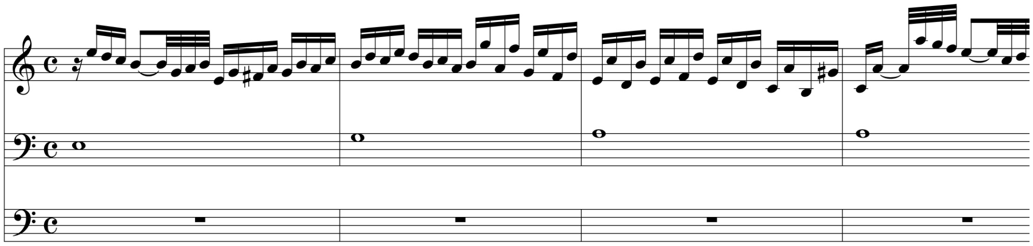
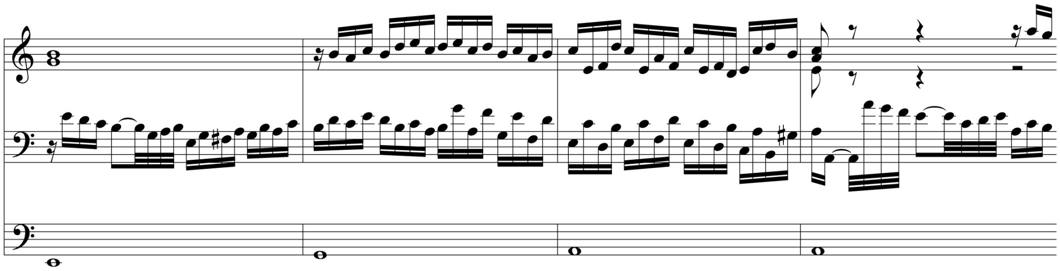
[57] Dietrich Buxtehude, *Choralbearbeitungen Me-W,* vol.2 of *Sämtliche Orgelwerke,* ed. Klaus Beckmann (Wiesbaden, Germany: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1972), 122-133.

Example 3: Bicinium texture with cantus firmus in long note values[58]



Example 3 contains a two voice texture in which the left hand plays the *cantus firmus* in long note values. The right hand provides the second voice in a far more florid and decorated texture. Later in the piece the *cantus firmus* moves to the upper voice and the accompaniment to the left hand. Also seen in this example is Buxtehude's extensive use of third and sixth intervals within the right hand figuration as well as between the two voices. Mastery of this technique is of great value to beginning improvisers and can be easily found throughout the *Te Deum*.

Example 4: Cantus firmus in the pedal[59]



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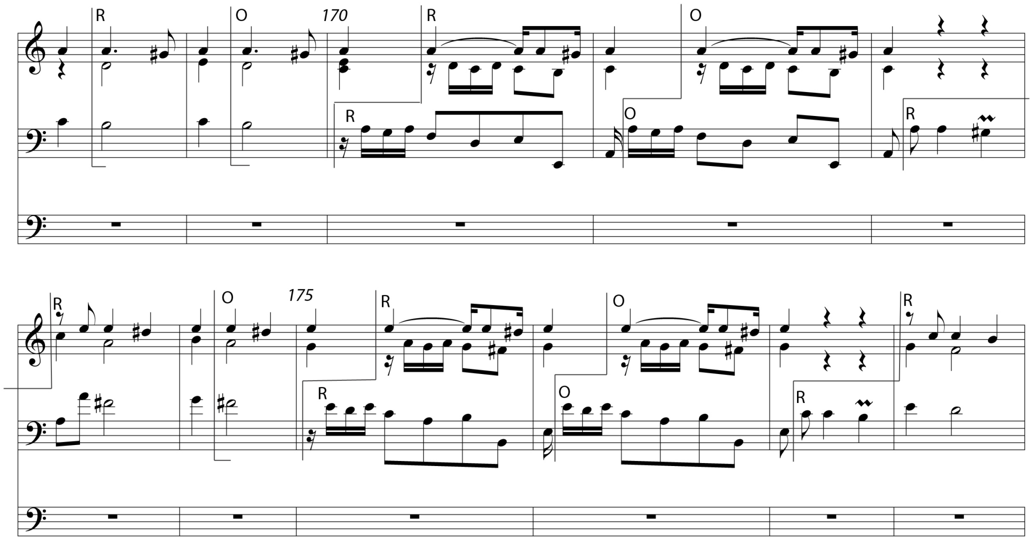
[58] Buxtehude, 124.

[59] Buxtehude, 125.

The placement of the *cantus firmus* in the pedal is common in organ music of this era. Example 4 provides an excellent model for this technique. Although the three-part texture is somewhat complicated for the beginner, Buxtehude demonstrates a pattern for imitation by maintaining a reliance on the triad, repeated patterns, and use of parallel motion.

Example 5: Echo technique between two manuals (identified by the markings R and O)[60]



The section of echoes beginning in measure 168 is based on a simple three-note motive that Buxtehude expands to great effect through harmonic change, transposition, and rhythmic variance. Additionally, the dialogue created through the contrasting sounds of the two keyboards further aids the transformation of a simple idea into almost ten measures of aurally stimulating material for the listener.

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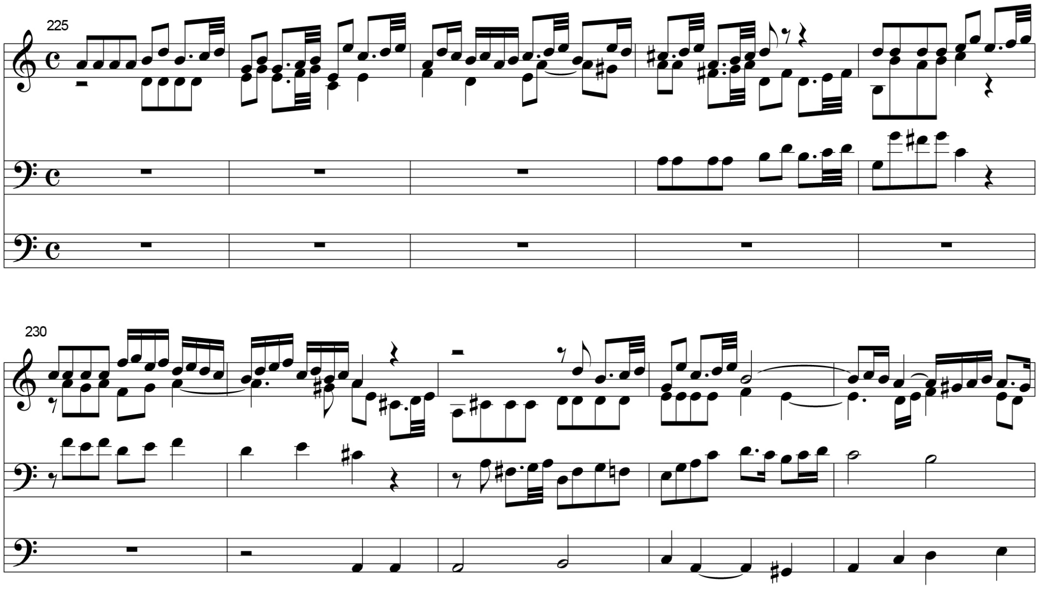
[60] Buxtehude, 129.

Example 6: Four voice fugue[61]



One of the most difficult forms to improvise is the fugue. While the above is a refined example that demonstrates Buxtehude's skill as a composer, the basic building blocks he uses are not beyond the capabilities of even an inexperienced improviser. The first step is to notice the key of each entrance: tonic, dominant, tonic, tonic. Next, establish a theme based on the melody being used and practice it in both tonic and dominant. Third, play the theme successively in four voices with smooth transitions between tonic and dominant. Finally, maintain the initial voices over new entrances through use of parallels and contrary motion. I have found that it is usually easiest to begin with a tenor entrance because that voice becomes the accompanying root for the alto and soprano entrances and thus allows the brain to focus on accuracy in these upper voices.

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[61] Buxtehude, 132.

Conclusion

Each of the tools discussed above will assist in becoming an accomplished improviser. The compositions they come from provide a few examples of the many ways in which complex music can be broken down into manageable and practicable parts. Porter points out the amazing stylistic versatility that works such as these represent by identifying them as “simply the most sophisticated expressions of a musical language that allowed more modest musicians to (also) create music of fine craftsmanship...”[62] Through diligent study of master works and practice of the idioms they reveal, any player can quickly progress from very basic and repetitive exercises into innovative and spontaneous in-performance compositions that adapt and change in context. The ability to combine various elements of studied musical language in a personal way is the spirit of north German baroque improvisation, revealing the ingenuity of a performer.

North German organists of the baroque era performed a persuasive role in the services they accompanied. In much the same way as a preacher, they had to be adaptable in order to enhance the services. Porter’s essay includes a quote by a pastor, Hector Mithobius, that embodies the climate of the time:

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[62] Porter, 74.

> The organist is not sitting up there just to show off his Art but rather to praise God artfully with a lovely harmony, and to move himself as well, but primarily the whole congregation, into "the rest of God," to a passionate devotion, to spiritual thoughts, and to joy in the Lord. By this he should awaken the spirit of the congregation and make them attentive, joyful and willing to join in the service.[63]

Such strong religious influence was undoubtedly the driving force behind the systematic creativity established during this era. Thankfully, the improvisation skills that *Te Deum* compositions codified can still be used as keys to unlocking new forms of expression and individuality in organ playing today.

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[63] Porter, 74.

CHAPTER 5

IMPROVISATION INSIGHTS THROUGH MUSICAL ANALYSIS: JOHANN GOTTFRIED WALTHER'S ALLEGRO FROM THE CONCERTO IN B MINOR

The baroque Italian concerto form enjoyed substantial popularity in Germany in the early eighteenth-century, and much of this success was through the efforts of German composers who transcribed many of the best instrumental Venetian concertos for keyboard. Whether these transcriptions were motivated by the desire for profit or as part of professional research, they successfully demonstrate the form's appeal, flexibility, and pedagogical value. Not surprisingly, these same traits make the concerto form an excellent model for improvisation as well.

Following is an analysis of the first movement of Johann Gottfried Walther's Concerto in B minor, showing how insights revealed by the analysis can be incorporated into the practice of improvisation. Walther was born in Erfurt, Germany in 1684 and began music instruction at the age of four. Although his father was not a professional musician, his mother was a distant relative to the family of Johann Sebastian Bach, and he had access to qualified and respected teachers throughout his training.[64]

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[64] George J. Buelow, "Walther, Johann Gottfried," in *Grove Music Online*. *Oxford Music Online*, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/29877 (accessed March 10, 2010).

The professional stage of Walther's life began with his appointment as organist at Weimar's Stadtkirche in 1707. He retained this post for the rest of his life; through it, he had direct personal and professional contact with Johann Sebastian Bach, who came to Weimar in 1708.[65] Both Walther and Bach produced several organ transcriptions of Italian concertos during their time in Weimar, and it is likely that they influenced each other in this endeavor.

Walther transcribed and arranged nearly eighty works by other composers for keyboard. To modern musicians, these are some of his best known works, and the fourteen surviving organ concertos are especially prominent. The B minor is perhaps the most commonly performed of his concertos, and this may be due to its convincing simplicity. It was transcribed sometime after 1721 from Antonio Vivaldi's violin concerto in E minor, RV 275, which had been published in Amsterdam as part of a concerto anthology by Jeanne Roger sometime between 1716 and 1721.[66]

Ritornello Form

The first movement of Walther's Concerto in B Minor transcription is in a ritornello form typical of Vivaldi and common during the Baroque period. "Ritornello," meaning "something that returns," refers to a theme stated at the beginning of the work or movement. This ritornello theme returns completely or partially throughout the work, with episodic material between statements. However, in this particular movement the structure deviates slightly from the expected ABACADA form by presenting new material (D) after the C section but before a ritornello statement. The resulting pattern becomes ABACDD^{1}AEA.

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[65] Buelow (accessed March 10, 2010).

[66] Hugh J. McLean, "Johann Gottfried Walther: 'Sämtliche Orgelwerke'," *Quarterly Journal of the Music Library Association* 58:3 (March 2002): 683

The D section gives the illusion of an A section because it begins with the same change in registration and dynamics that is used for the ritornello material. Theme D is immediately echoed in the softer dynamic and registration of the other episodes. What results is an eight-measure episode (Ep. 3) of new material without the primary motive (discussed later in the analysis) or any other obvious ritornello components. The change in form creates a mirror structure with the pivot point falling at the exact half-way point of the piece, m33 between Ep. 2 and Ep. 3. The altered structure can be clearly seen in the basic chart of Example 1.

Example 1: Basic Form of Walther's Allegro from the B minor Concerto

Rit.	**Ep. 1**	**Rit.**	**Ep. 2**	**Ep. 3**	**Rit.**	**Ep. 4**	**Rit**
A	B	A	C	D,D^1	A	E	A

Constructing a Ritornello

In its system of a repeated pattern, the ritornello concerto form is a perfect model for beginning improvisation because the structural concept is so simple. The first step is to construct a strong ritornello progression that is easy to remember. Walther's concerto models a simple eight-measure period consisting of four parts: 1) two and a half measures of tonic to dominate that establish the key and rhythm, 2) two and a half measures of a descending sequence, 3) two measures of a dominant pedal point, 4) and a one-measure perfect authentic cadence. Example 2 demonstrates the chords utilized by Walther in Roman numerals.

Example 2: Basic Chord Progressions by Beat (mm1-9db) of Walther's Allegro from the B minor Concerto:

m1	**m2**	**m3**	**m4**	**m5**	**m6**	**m7**	**m8 (m9db)**
i - V6 -	i - V6 -	i - iv -	VII - III -	VI - ii -	V - - -	V - - -	V6 - i V (i)

By utilizing a simple four-part harmonization in which the right hand plays a triad and the left hand plays the chord root, Walther's chord progression can be quickly memorized. It is important to keep strict count so that the progression doesn't wander or break down. Once the progression is memorized it can be truly assimilated by transposing into several different keys in both major and minor mode. This type of exercise firmly establishes the ritornello idea into the player's harmonic language to be called up in part or in whole during the course of an improvisation.

Developing a Harmonic Plan

The next step in improvising a ritornello form concerto is to map out a harmonic road map. Walther's Allegro movement adheres to a typical harmonic plan for concerto movements of the time, beginning and ending in a tonic of B minor and transitioning through the closely related keys of D Major and F# minor in the middle. It is interesting to note that, like the form, the harmonic structure is also mirrored, moving from B minor to D Major to F# minor and then back through D Major before concluding in B minor. This type of mirrored progression is easily remembered in the course of an improvisation. Example 3 shows the basic harmonic map of the movement.

Example 3: Harmonic Road Map of Walther's Allegro from the B minor Concerto

Rit.	**Ep. 1**	**Rit.**	**Ep. 2**	**Ep. 3**	**Rit.**	**Ep. 4**	**Rit**
B minor	B minor - D Major	D Major - F# minor	F# minor - D Major	D Major	D Major - B minor	B minor	B minor

When starting to improvise it is advisable to first work out the ritornellos in each of the keys they will appear (skipping over the episodic material as that will be addressed later). In the beginning it is not necessary to make harmonic shifts during the course of the ritornello as Walther has done. Rather, in the early stages direct transitions sound very nice and, more importantly, allow the improviser to focus on fewer things at once. Elements that are important at this stage are strict four-part harmony, rhythm and duration.

When the improviser feels comfortable moving from one ritornello to the next smoothly, s/he can begin to incorporate the harmonic shifts as demonstrated by Walther. All of the harmonic shifts are accomplished through the use of sequences based on the circle of fifths. A precedent for this technique is established in the opening ritornello, which contains a three-measure descending sequence of falling fifths in the bass line and a descending scalar melodic line. This exact sequence reappears in the first episode, but is expanded to a measure and a half and pivots to the relative major key of D Major. In fact, versions of this sequence appear in all but two sections (Rit. 3 and Ep. 3). These two sections still use sequences, but are instead based on ascending and descending scales rather than the circle of fifths.

Melodic and Motivic Content

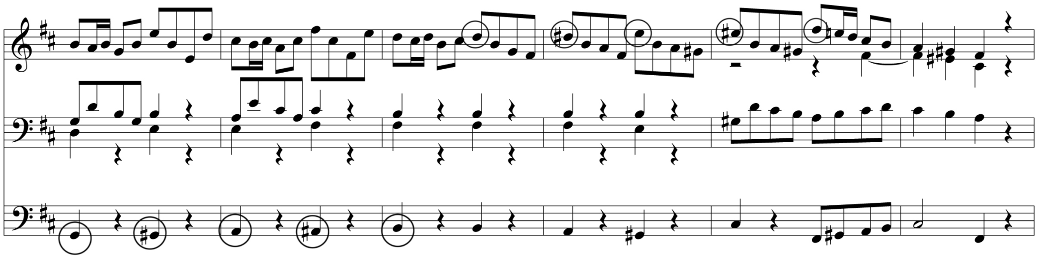
Once the organist is secure with the ritornello sections s/he should work on improvising the episodic material. While Walther's model utilizes free material, in improvising it is often better to rely on preexisting material. Hymn melodies or well-known tunes constitute a great resource upon which to base the episodes. These materials have the dual advantage of being easy to remember and easily recognizable to the audience. Additionally, they provide a structure and harmony within which to work. After a melody is selected and harmonized (demonstrated in chapter 3), the concerto style benefits from a bicinium (demonstrated in chapter 4) in which the melody appears in either the upper or lower voice. The contrast between four-part ritornellos and two-voice episodes creates contrast to help listeners stay engaged. At this point the improviser would do well to utilize some of the idioms of the selected melody in the ritornello as well.

Walther demonstrates several ways to incorporate melodic elements into his concerto movements. Following are examples of his treatment of two types of scale passages as well as the use of a distinctive motive. These three ideas serve as models for how an organist might construct sequences and assimilate unique melodic features into improvisations.

Ascending and descending scales of at least four pitches feature prominently in the Allegro movement of Walther's Concerto in B minor. The scales appear both chromatically and harmonically, creating a sense of motion and helping to avoid redundancy in the sequences.

In the second ritornello, a chromatic scale is used to great effect, both to create excitement and to transition into a new key. The scale contains five pitches and appears first in the pedal. At the conclusion of the pedal statement of the scale, it is transferred immediately to the top voice, culminating on a high F# before quickly falling to a perfect authentic cadence in the next measure (Ex. 4).

Example 4: Ascending Chromatic Scale (mm19-24):[67]



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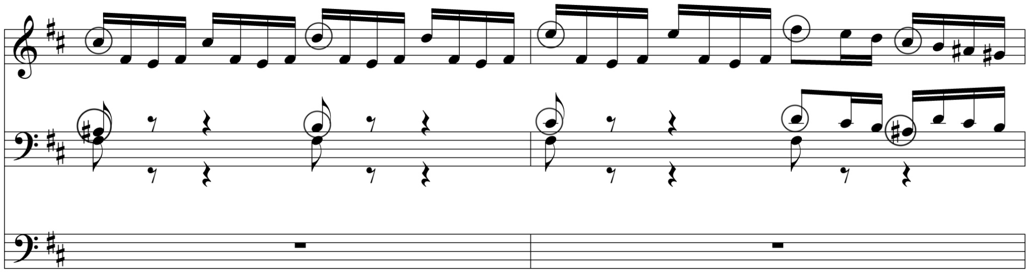
[67] Johann Gottfried Walther, *Organ Concertos Based on Old Masters,* ed. Wolfgang Auler (Prag, Germany: Bärenreiter Kassel, 1979), 18.

An excellent example of the use of a rising scale to create tension in an otherwise harmonically static passage occurs in mm53-54. Here the violinistic passage work is punctuated by a four-note ascending scale in parallel thirds between the right and left hand over a pedal F#. As in the previous example, this scale culminates on a high F#, the highest point of the phrase, before falling quickly into a cadence (Ex. 5).

Example 5: Ascending Four Note Scale (mm53-54)[68]



Apart from the almost excessive use of sequences and scales, this concerto movement relies on a simple motivic idea for structure. Based on a three note scale, the motive is comprised of an eighth-note followed by two sixteenth-notes and a final eighth-note. The two sixteenth-notes are simply a decoration of the middle pitch, either through the use of an appoggiatura or an escape tone depending on whether it is ascending or descending (Exx. 6-7). The resulting rhythmic pattern creates buoyancy and levity in the mood of the piece, injecting vigor into what would otherwise be monotonous sequences. This motive also helps to identify the ritornello material because it does not appear in the episodes.

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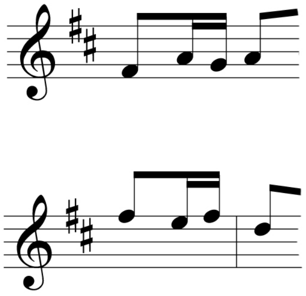
[68] Walther, 21.

Examples 6 & 7: Ascending and Descending Motive (mm1-2 & m6)[69]



Conclusion

Walther's organ transcription of Vivaldi's violin concerto is an excellent improvisation model for two reasons. First, it assimilates borrowed music from a well-known and respected composer; second, it demonstrates how relatively simple techniques can create interesting and pleasant music. Its basic components--standard ritornello form, a conservative harmonic structure, creative use of sequences, and one simple motivic idea--make it accessible even to beginning improvisers. These same components are treated with high levels of sophistication in the Allegro movement, thus serving more advanced improvisers as well by showing innovation within the form and stylistic variety. The compositional elements of this movement likely led Walther to adapt the concerto for the organ. Additionally, they are what make this piece, and other compositions like it, valuable assets in improvisation pedagogy.

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[69] Walther, 17.

Structural Diagram of Walther's Concert in B Minor - I. Allegro

Sections	**Ritornello**	**Episode 1**	**Ritornello**	**Episode 2**	**Episode 3**	**Ritornello**	**Episode IV**	**Ritornello**
Measures	1 - 10db	10 - 17db	17 - 24^3	24^3 - 33db	33 - 40^3	40^4 - 50	51 - 57db	57-66
Key	B Minor	B minor -> D Major	D Major -> F# Minor	F# Minor -> D Major	D Major	D Major -> B Minor	B Minor	B Minor
Key Relationship	Tonic	Tonic -> Relative Major	Relative Major -> Minor Dom.	Minor Dom. -> Relative Major	Relative Major	Relative Major -> Tonic	Tonic	Tonic
Major Cadences	PAC 10db	PAC 17db	PAC 24^3	PAC 33db	PAC 37db HC 40^3	PAC 50	PAC 57db	PAC 66
Comments	1. Primary motive is introduced 2. Descending melodic scale from f#-b in mm1-2 which reappears throughout 3. Circle of 5ths in the bass voice (mm3-6)	1. No use of primary motive 2. Only 2 voices 3. Circle of fifths helps transition from Tonic to Rel. Maj.	1. Starts the same but in the Rel. Maj. 2. Primary motive reappears 3. Two ascending chromatic lines, first in bass and then in soprano, help transition to F# Minor	1. Begins with a circle of 5ths 2. No use of primary motive	1. No use of primary motive 2. Second half is an altered echo of the first half 3. Circle of fifths 4. Only section to end in a HC	1. Based on the primary motive 2. Extensive use of sequence	1. No use of primary motive 2. Ascending four note scale in melody used twice	1. Exact recap of the original ritornello 2. Concludes with a 2 measure cadential extension

CHAPTER 6

IMPROVISATIONAL INSIGHTS THROUGH MUSICAL ANALYSIS: JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH'S *FUGUE IN G MAJOR*, BWV 541

Of the many compositional techniques practiced by Johann Sebastian Bach, fugal writing is perhaps the most significant. His masterful fugues are unrivaled technically, and their beauty and elegance earns them a privileged position in the canon of Western art music.

The Fugue in G Major, BWV 541, shows Bach's ability to compose at the highest technical level while still conveying an intriguing and beautiful musical idea. This fugue is full of contrapuntal elements such as canon, stretto, and sequencing, and Bach goes beyond a basic implementation of these components by overlaying them on each other in various ways. Strikingly, the end effect does not sound labored, academic, or boring, but is instead lighthearted, elevating, and enjoyable. While it is unlikely that anyone could achieve Bach's level of compositional sophistication in an improvisation, the G Major Fugue reveals many helpful ideas that can enhance the structure and aesthetic of any improvisation.

It is uncertain when the Fugue in G Major was composed because Bach made several revisions of it during the course of his life. Most scholars agree that it was conceived during his time working as organist and Konzertmeister in the city of Weimar. He held this post from 1708-1717 and was extremely active in organ composition at that time. Not only did he compose many original works for the organ, but he also spent much time studying and transcribing the works of other famous composers for keyboard, notably Antonio Vivaldi. Bach's focus on organ composition during his time in Weimar helped him to develop a distinctive instrumental style that is clearly seen in the Fugue in G Major.

Structure and Form

The Fugue in G Major is a perfect example of the instrumental fugal writing style known as *Spielfugen*. The direct translation for this term would be "Play Fugue" in English; indeed, the extended use of playful figurations characterizes the genre. As opposed to vocal elaborations, instrumental figurations tend to include longer phrases, more sequences, disjunct melodies, larger leaps, and broken figurations such as arpeggios.[70]

Two specific elements of *Spielfugen* are immediately seen in the opening theme of BWV 541. First, the theme begins with repeated eighth notes, quickly introducing faster moving sixteenth-notes to create a sense of increased momentum.[71] Second, there is a prominent four beat sequence that rises a major third beginning in the first measure (see Example 1).

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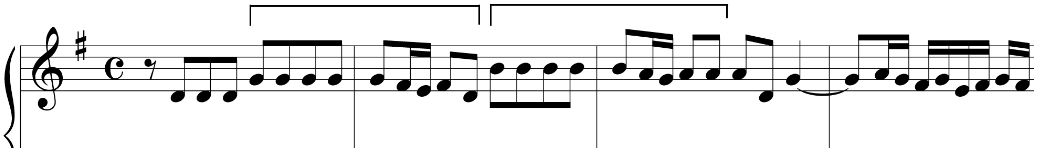
[70] George B. Stauffer, "Fugue Types in Bach's Free Organ Works," in *J.S. Bach as Organist*, ed. George B. Stauffer and Ernest May (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 134-35.

[71] Renee Anne Louprett, "Interpreting Bach," *The Organ* 81:319 (February-April 2002), 20.

Example 1: Fugue Subject[72]



Other examples of the *Spielfugen* idiom come throughout the work. Notably, the extensive use of arpeggiation, especially in the episodic material, as well as many sequences, some of them as long as four repetitions (mm48-49) which is rare in Bach's compositions.

The Fugue in G Major has four voices and contains a straightforward exposition with the first three voices (alto, tenor and bass) each entering immediately at the conclusion of the preceding voice. However, there is a short sequencing bridge based on a circle of fifths before the final subject's entrance in the soprano in m14. Episode 1 expands on the ideas from the unexpected bridge, thereby enforcing the importance of sequencing material to the work's overall structure.

It is typical for *Spielfugen* to contain frequent episodes that increase in complexity and length as the work progresses.[73] This is the case in BWV 541 in the sense that episodic material comprises a large portion of the work and like the fugue subject is fully developed. The table below provides a visual representation of the proportions of each statement and episode relative to the fugue as a whole.

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[72] Johann Sebastian Bach, "Fugue in G Major," BWV 541, in *Orgelwerke: Band 5,* ed. Dietrich Kilian (Kassel, Germany: Bärenreiter, 1972), 151.

[73] Stauffer, 137.

Table 1: Proportionate Lengths of Statements (St.) and Episodes (Ep.)

	Exposition	**Ep.1**	**St. 2**	**Ep. 2**	**St. 3**	**Ep. 3**	**St. 4**	**Ep. 4**	**St. 5**	**Ep. 5**	**St. 6**
m#	1 - 17^3	17^3 - 26db	26 - 30^3	30^3 - 35db	35 - 38^3	38^3 - 52^3	52^3 - 56db	56db - 59^3	59^3 - 63db	63 - 66db	66 - 83

Each episode contains at least one distinctive feature that contributes to its independent nature. Bach further highlights the episodes by treating the fugue subject straightforwardly in sections of comparable length to the episodes. Only the exposition and the final statement contain more than one presentation of the theme, and in all but one case the statements end with imperfect authentic cadences.

Bach uses a clever formative concept in the statement sections of this fugue that is not immediately apparent. In the exposition the theme is presented first in the alto, followed by the tenor, then bass, and finally concluding with the soprano voice. The next statements (two through five) each contain only one subject occurrence, but preserve the same order of appearances: statement two in the alto, statement three in the tenor, statement four in the bass, and statement five in the soprano. Although this consistency may seem to be a minor detail, it helps the listener follow the fugue's structure and serves as an excellent model for improvisation.

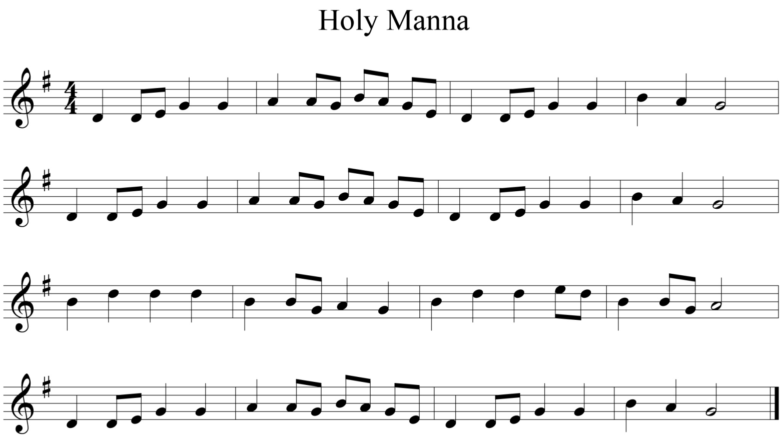
The many elements of a contrapuntal composition can quickly overwhelm the improviser. It is therefore especially important to incorporate them slowly in the beginning. The novice should focus on creating a basic structural road map and a simple exposition. Table 2 shows a possible road map for an improvisation incorporating Bach's formative model:

Table 2: Range (soprano, alto, tenor and bass) and Order of Fugue Statements

	Expo.	**Ep.1**	**St.2**	**Ep.2**	**St.3**	**Ep.3**	**St.4**	**Ep.4**	**St.5**	**Ep.5**	**St.6**
Statement Ranges	S,A,T,B	-	S	-	A	-	T	-	B	-	S,A,T,B

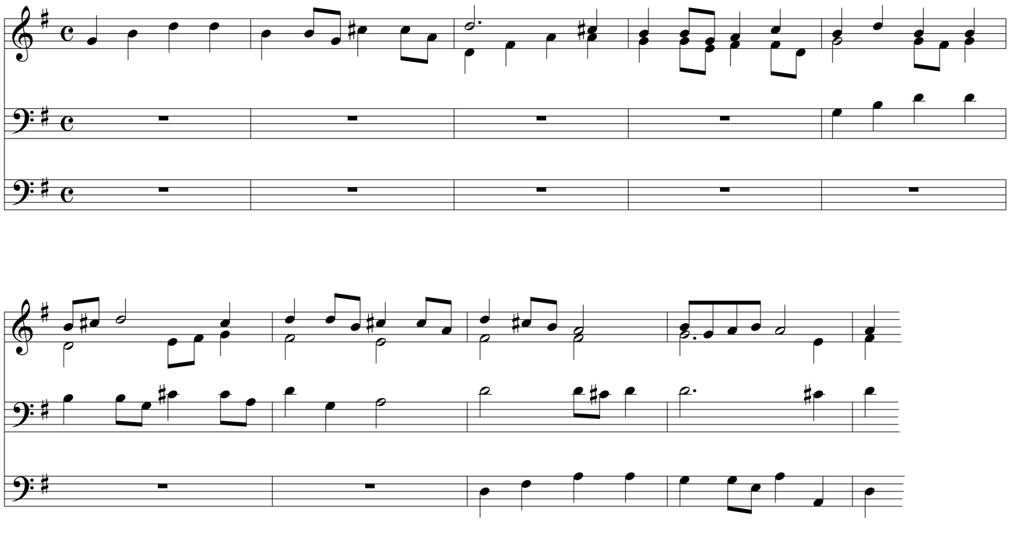
With a structure in place, the next step is to create a fugue statement and an exposition. Hymn melodies are an excellent source of material to draw from because they consist of short phrases and are tonally stable. Additionally, they have the added benefit of being recognizable to large amounts of people and can therefore make an improvisation more accessible to the listener. Example 2 is the hymn tune *Holy Manna* attributed to William Moore and first published sometime around 1825. It is a popular American folk tune and is well suited to polyphonic improvisation.

Example 2: 'Holy Manna' Hymn Tune



There are several distinctive features of *Holy Manna* that can be used in creating a fugue subject and exposition. Example 3 illustrates one possibility which comes from the third phrase. Like Bach's fugue, this incorporates a simple sequence and a distinctive motivic idea (discussed later in this chapter).

Example 3: Simple Four Voice Fugue Exposition from 'Holy Manna'



In this exposition the voices enter in the order of soprano, alto tenor and bass. The subject is also crafted to move from tonic to dominant pitches making transposition simple. These types of considerations help minimize the number of variables that need to be considered during the course of an improvisation.

Harmonic Structure

Bach follows a fairly conservative tonal map in the G-Major fugue, although there are some unexpected and creative treatments of the tonality that bring a sense of freshness to the work. The key of G Major is well suited to the tonal and idiomatic expectations of the *Spielfugen* form, and for the most part Bach remains within the closely related keys (G: a, b, C, D, e). As expected, he transitions into the dominant key of D Major by the end of the exposition, but does so with a sophisticated progression that prolongs the shift and misleads the listener. Beginning in m14, Bach introduces the C-sharp leading tone of D Major but almost immediately also inserts a G sharp. This note is the leading tone of A Major/Minor and gives a false impression that the tonality is shifting to the supertonic rather than the dominant. This is perhaps a small foreshadowing of the fugue's move to A minor in the fifth statement, but it is soon clear that the E-Major triad created by the G sharp is only functioning as a secondary dominant in the key of D Major. A strong perfect authentic cadence in m17 confirms this function of the E-Major triad.

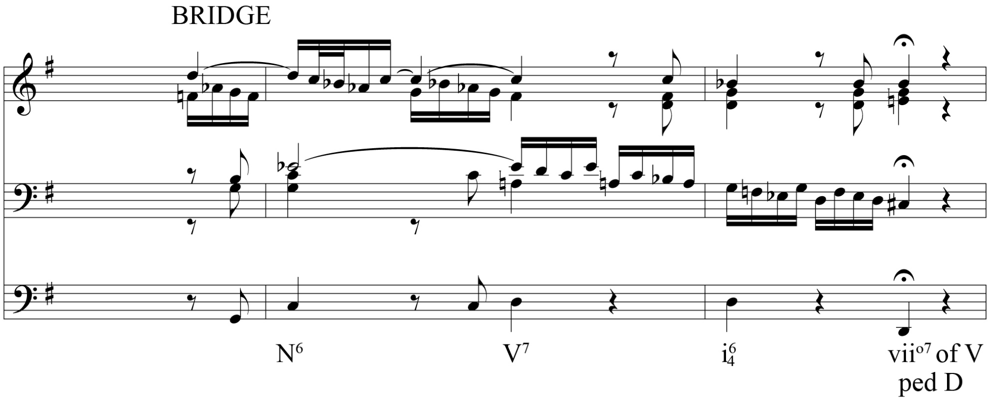
The fugue remains in D Major from the end of the exposition through the first episode and second statement, but in m29 the end of the fugue subject is altered slightly with the addition of a D sharp. This alteration creates a cadence in E minor, the submediant of Tonic G, and is very subtly achieved. Once the fugue arrives in E minor, it stays there through the second episode, third statement, and part of the third episode. In m43, Bach writes an imperfect authentic cadence in E minor, but instead of concluding the third episode at this point he continues the sixteenth-note motion of the right hand. The next two measures contain an instance of double-counterpoint between the right and left hand that transitions the tonality back to D Major by the end of m45.

At the end of the fourth episode the tonality again shifts, this time to the supertonic A minor that had been foreshadowed earlier in the piece. The soprano subject statement in A minor in mm59-63 is the culmination of the fugue's four single statements retracing the exposition order of Alto, Tenor, Bass, and Soprano. It is also the climax in range for the work with the repetitions of the high C in the right hand sounding against low Ds and Cs in the pedal line.

Bach only remains in A minor for four measures, and in the fifth episode moves back to Tonic G. However, he surprises the listener with a shift to the parallel key of G minor at the beginning of statement 6 in m66. The presence of a B flat in this subject presentation creates an immediate sense of weight and downward pull in the piece, an atmosphere reinforced in the bridge material leading to the fermata in m71.

The bridge in mm69-71 is the most harmonically innovative section of the fugue and is unprecedented in the majority of Bach's free organ works. This short bridge functions as a drawn-out deceptive cadence, beginning with a Neapolitan six chord set-up in m69, continuing with a cadential 6/4 chord in m71, and concluding with the fully-diminished seventh chord over a pedal D at the end of m71. The addition of the fermata over this chord further emphasizes the weighted and downward sensation from the beginning of the statement, bringing the entire work to a complete stop on an extremely dissonant chord (see Example 4).

Example 4: Bridge in mm69-71[74]



After the complete stop in m71, the fugue launches into the final statements of the theme in a flurry of complex activity with all four voices sounding. There are two consecutive cases of stretto on the subject in mm72-79.

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[74] Bach, 156.

The first begins in m72 with the bass; the alto enters a half-measure later. The second stretto begins in the soprano voice in m75 before the alto statement has finished, and is also followed by the alto voice a half-measure later. After these two overlapping strettos, the final entrance of the subject starts in the tenor voice in m79, again beginning before the alto voice has finished. Such fast and overlapping statements of the theme give a cascading crescendo effect to the end that is common in *Spielfugen* form.

All of the techniques discussed in this section represent refined and advanced harmonic processes. However, by analyzing, imitating, and transposing them one at a time to many different keys, each of the concepts will soon become part of an improviser's extended harmonic language and hopefully lead to some truly innovative improvised music.

A good first step to copy from the G-Major Fugue is to formulate a harmonic road map that can be easily remembered and copied during the course of an improvisation. Table 3 outlines one possibility for the *Holy Manna* tune modeled after Bach's example in BWV 541. An advantage of this particular set-up is that the episodes can be used to modulate to different keys. It is important to realize that even Bach doesn't use all four voices all the time so as to not weigh down the music and fatigue listeners. During the episodes it is advisable to thin the texture to only two or three voices which gives fewer variables to control and allows for easier modulation. The bicinium technique described in Chapter's 3 and 4 is a good option to consider.

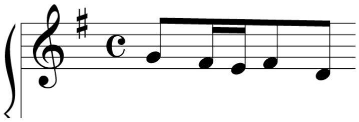
Table 3: Harmonic Road Map for 'Holy Manna' Improvisation

	Expo.	**Ep.1**	**St.2**	**Ep.2**	**St.3**	**Ep.3**	**St.4**	**Ep.4**	**St.5**	**Ep.5**	**St.6**
Keys	GM-DM	DM	DM	Dm-Em	Em	Em-DM	DM	DM-Am	Am	Am-GM	Gm-GM

Motivic Material

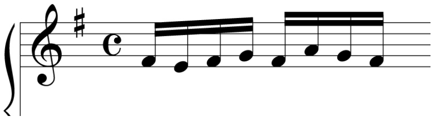
Most of the material in the Fugue in G Major comes out of two basic motives that are both presented in the first four measures. The first motive (motive A) is heard in the subject and is composed of only four notes. Its primary feature is a descending motion with a sixteenth-note lower neighbor tone on the second pitch. This figure is commonly referred to as the rhythm of joy in Bach's music because of its crisp and buoyant nature. Motive A returns throughout the fugue and is treated in a variety of ways, including diminution in mm51-52. The most common alteration of motive A, however, is the addition of an eighth note on the end of the figuration that connects the motive with subsequent material. Usually motive A is preceded by repeated eighth notes as demonstrated in Example 3.

Example 5: Motive A[75]



The second motive (motive B) occurs in accompanying material directly after the first subject. Two beats long, motive B consists of a series of sixteenth-notes that centers around the interval of a third and wraps around a central pitch (see Example 6). This motive does not appear very often in the exact form of its first statement, but most of the sequences and accompanying material are derived from its general form. As the work progresses, especially in the later episodes, motive B is expanded outward through arpeggiations but still with the wrapping nature demonstrated in its initial occurrence.

Example 6: Motive B[76]



A comprehensive discussion of the B motive and its complex treatment in this fugue goes beyond the scope of practical beginning improvisation. It is important to point out, however, that Bach uses sequences and circles of fifths extensively throughout the fugue, many of which incorporate motives A & B in some way. In doing this, the composer demonstrates the power of a simple idea in unifying the fugue. This principle of highlighting only one or two distinctive motives from a melody should be followed when improvising. Example 7 shows a borrowed motivic idea from the third phrase of *Holy Manna* to be incorporated into the fugue subject.

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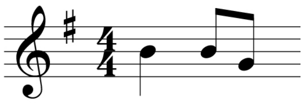
[75] Bach, 151.

[76] Bach, 151.

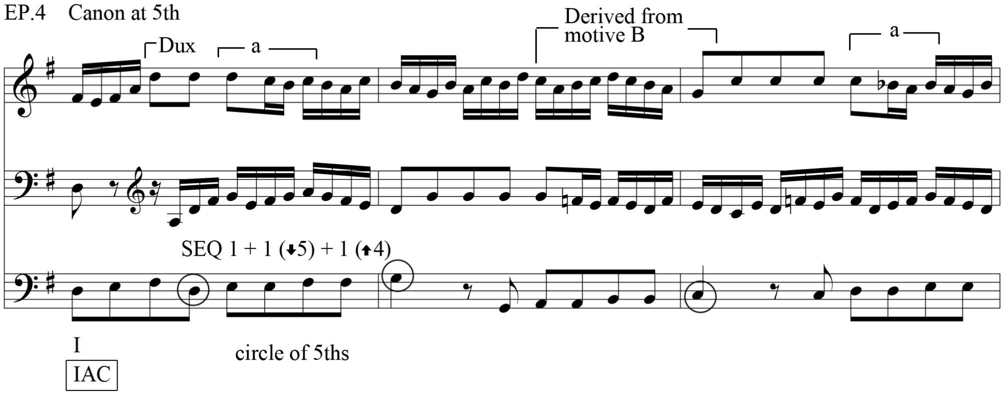
Example 7: "Holy Manna" motive in Fugue Subject



Canon

Another technique that Bach uses in the GMajor Fugue is canon, which appears in episodes four and five. Consequently, these two episodes are the most intricate, incorporating all of the major components of the fugue: motive A, motive B, sequence, circle of fifths, and canon. Such complexity is expected in the *Spielfugen* form and more than makes up for the relatively short lengths of these final two episodes. The manner in which Bach layers the many components in episode four is shown in Example 8.

Example 8: Episode Four, mm56-58[77]



In the early stages of improvisation the insertion of a canon into a three or four voice polyphonic texture is prohibitively difficult. However, playing a melody in simple canon is the first step to achieving that goal. The tune *Holy Manna* is an excellent resource for practicing the canon technique. Example 9 shows the first phrase of *Holy Manna* in canon at the unison. This can be easily continued through all four phrases of the melody without interruption. Once learned, the canon should be transposed to different keys, and eventually tried at different intervals and with other temporal displacements (half-measure, 1 beat, etc.).

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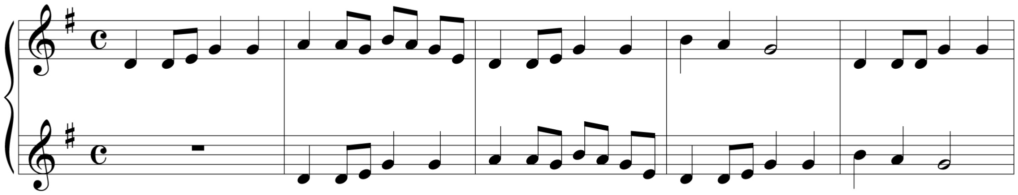
[77] Bach, 155.

Example 9: 'Holy Manna' Canon at the Unison



Conclusion

The Fugue in G Major, like most of Bach's compositions, demonstrates his unmatched ability to create beautiful music that is simultaneously enjoyable to the average listener and intellectually deep. Bach has modeled a multi-layered masterwork of contrapuntal composition that transcends its academic underpinnings through its energy and ebullience. By analyzing the simple musical elements of this piece—short motives, sequences, circles of fifths, and canons—one can devise a basic scheme for improvising a simple fugue. Over time, as these ideas are practiced and combined, the techniques will be assimilated, and the improviser will be able to call upon them while playing. Using these building blocks just as Bach did, organists today can improvise creatively in the most difficult of contrapuntal forms.

Structural Diagram of Fugue in G Major, BWV 541 by J.S. Bach

Sections	**Exposition**	**Episode 1**	**Statement 2**	**Episode 2**	**Statement 3**	**Episode 3**	**Statement 4**	**Episode 4**	**Statement 5**	**Episode 5**	**Statement 6**
Measures	1 - 17^3	17^3 - 26db	26 - 30^3	30^3 - 35db	35 - 38^3	38^3 - 52^3	52^3 - 56db	56db - 59^3	59^3 - 63db	63 - 66db	66 - 83
Key	G Major -> D Major	D Major	D Major -> E Minor	E Minor	E Minor	E Minor -> D Major	D Major	D Major -> A Minor	A Minor	A Minor -> G Major	G Minor -> G Major
Key Relationship	Tonic -> Dominant	Dominant	Dominant -> Relative Minor	Relative Minor	Relative Minor	Relative Minor -> Dominant	Dominant	Dominant -> Super Tonic	Super Tonic	Super Tonic -> Tonic	Parallel Minor -> Tonic
Major Cadences	PAC - m.17	IAC - m.26	IAC - m.30	PAC - m. 35	IAC - m. 38	PAC m. 53	IAC - m. 56	HC - m. 59	PAC - m. 63		HC - m. 72 PAC - m. 83
Soprano	4. Answer								Subject at ii		4. Subject
Alto	1. Subject		Subject								3. Answer at ii 5. IV (tonal)
Tenor	1. Answer (tonal)				Subject at vi						6. Answer at IV (real)
Bass	3. Subject						Subject at IV				1. Subject at i 2. Subject at I
Comments	1. Four Voice Fugue (ATBS) 2. Primary motive (a) appears in m. 2 3. Motive ‘b’ appears in m. 5 4. Short Bridge between 3rd and 4th voice entrance	1. Circle of 5ths in bass (mm. 17-19 & 22-24) 2. Interesting point of imitation between soprano and tenor (mm. 23-25)	1. Ends with an IAC	1. Theme reminiscent of subject appears in RH (mm. 30^3 - 32^2)	1. Ends with an IAC	1. Significantly longer than other episodes 2. Double counterpoint between soprano and tenor (mm. 43^4 - 46^3) 3. Extensive use of arpeggiation 4. Motive derived from ‘a’ in the tenor (mm. 50-52)	1. Episode 3 and Statement 4 are elided 2. Ends with an IAC	1. Canon at the 5th between soprano and alto 2. Circle of 5ths in bass 3. Ends with a HC	1. Interesting point of imitation between tenor and alto (m. 61)	1. 3 Part canon at the 4th between tenor, alto & soprano 2. Canon theme based on motive ‘a’	1. Begins with parallel minor key 2. Use of a N6 chord in m. 70^1 3. Comes to a complete stop on a dissonant chord in m. 71 4. 2 cases of stretto: mm. 72-75 (bass & alto) mm. 75-79 (soprano & alto)

CHAPTER 7

IMPROVISATIONAL TECHNIQUES DEMONSTRATED IN THE HARMONIC BUILDING BLOCKS OF JOHANNES BRAHMS'S PRÄLUDIUM IN G-MOLL, WoO010

Although Johannes Brahms is not well known as a composer for the organ, his few extant works demonstrate a passion for the versatility and power of the instrument. This enthusiasm is especially obvious in the G minor Präludium from 1857, composed when Brahms was in his early twenties. The piece, with its distinctive, contrasting sections and rhapsodic character, appears to be modeled on North German toccatas of composers such as Vincent Lübeck and Dietrich Buxtehude. Brahms, however, takes ownership of the form through experimentation with virtuosic passagework, persistent chromaticism, and heavy use of diminished seventh chords. Not only is this Präludium an excellent example of Brahms's early compositional style, its spontaneous nature and easily imitated musical ideas make it a fine model for improvisation.

Rhapsodic Road Map

The Präludium begins with a dramatic six-measure phrase in 12/8 time, that establishes the key of g minor and ends on the dominant. To create excitement, Brahms starts the section with upward moving arpeggios over a long diatonic sequence of chords in fifth relationship. The second half of the phrase continues to employ sequences based on fifths, but there is now more rapid chord change, contrary motion between the right and left hand, and introduction of chromatically altered chords, including several diminished seventh chords and an augmented six chord that leads to the final dominant.

Following the opening flourish, the time signature changes to common time where it will remain for the duration of the Präludium. The texture of the writing also changes as the second section begins. Brahms abandons active arpeggios in favor of virtuosic scale passages that give way to a long descending chromatic line in the bass. In m9, the augmented six chord from the first sections reappears twice as the second section cadences in m10 on the dominant.

The third section makes a direct modal shift away from the D Major triad in m10 and begins in the key of d minor. Because of the slower note values and more homophonic texture, the music seems to be giving the listener time to catch breath after all the activity. Nevertheless, Brahms still maintains tension by incorporating sequences, potent suspensions, and chromatic diminished seventh chords.

The repose of the third section is short-lived, however, as upward moving scale passages like those in the second section begin again in m16. Just as before, the music begins with the dominant triad (A Major), but following the climax it descends with the left hand outlining thirds rather than chromatically.

By the time the descent is completed in m21, Brahms has transitioned back to the key of G minor and begins another rising sequence. Rising by half-steps, this sequence alternates between root position and first inversion triads for the first two measures before giving way to a chromatically ascending bass line leading back to G minor in m24.

The sixth section, beginning in m26, is reminiscent of the opening, with upward moving arpeggios heard over a relatively slow-moving bass line. Brahms now transitions from G minor through B flat minor to finally arrive briefly in A minor. This key change is accomplished through use of an unexpected German six chord resolution at the end of m29.

The seventh section, which begins in m31, is a restatement of the third section, but now in the home key of G minor. Unlike the third section, however, the music moves directly into an extended sequence, beginning on a D Major triad and descending one octave in a dominant seven to tonic progression (V7-I) repeated four times. Finally, this extended section concludes with a shortened version of the opening material wherein rising arpeggios give way to contrarily moving outer voices that work apart to a four octave range. In contrast to the opening, Brahms achieves this effect in only two measures instead of four by utilizing a chromatically descending bass line.

Beginning in m40, the eighth and final section serves as a large perfect authentic cadence by transitioning from the dominant to the tonic. Unlike the rest of the piece, this section begins high and works its way down, creating a sense of closure. Interestingly, Brahms obscures the beat by grouping the descending figures into triplets that don't line up with the 4/4 time signature. Such metric chaos before the final cadence is perhaps to keep the listener engaged. As the music approaches the final measure, a slower tempo marking, increasing note values (from 32nd to 1/2 notes), and chromatic alteration all combine to give a clear sense of finality.

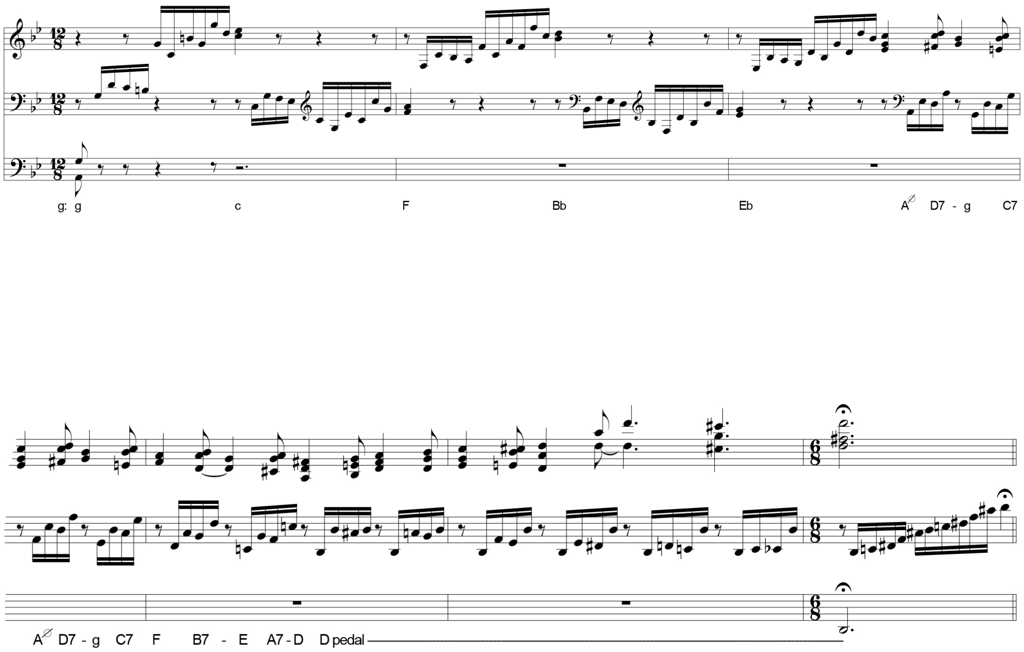
Insights for Improvisation

Although a long tradition exists of using composed works or composing pieces specifically as improvisation models for students, it is uncertain whether Brahms had improvisation in mind when composing his Präludium in G minor. However, the work does appear to be a study of 18th-century toccata style. The Prelude also contains many imitable ideas. Specifically, Brahms utilizes three harmonic elements that can quickly be incorporated into an improvisation: use of sequence, parallel third and sixth motion, and phrase extension or key change through an augmented six chord.

Sequence:

Brahms uses sequences extensively throughout the Präludium. Most of these fall into two categories: diatonic chords in fifth relationship and chromatic scale passages. An excellent example of diatonic chords in fifth relationship occurs at the very beginning (see Example 1). On the down beat of the first measure is a G Major chord that is arpeggiated over the first two beats, and the second half of the measure contains a C minor triad in the same manner. The sequence continues in the subsequent two measures through F Major, Bb Major, and Eb Major chords, concluding with an A half-diminished seven chord.

Example 1:[78]



Through an elision on the A half-diminished seven chord in m3, Brahms immediately picks up a new sequence that is similar in concept to the first. The second sequence, however, is much faster paced than the first, moving from one chord to the next in one beat rather than two. Alternating between dominant seven chords and their corresponding tonics the sequence progresses from D7 to G, C7 to F, Bb7 to E, and concludes with A7 to D in m4. The final D chord is extended over a pedal point for two and half measures before reaching its climax at the end of the phrase.

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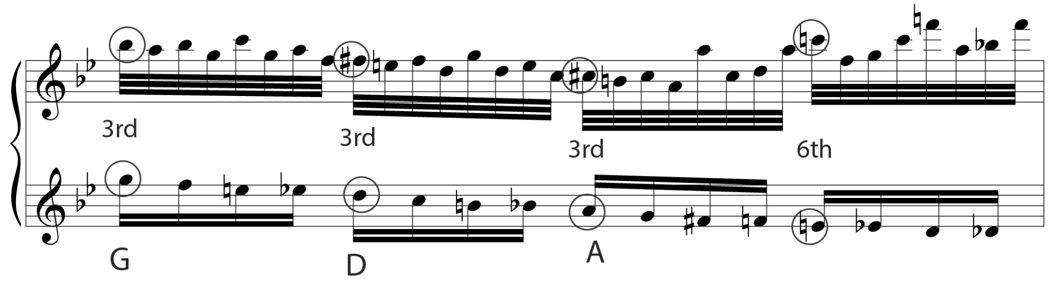
[78] Johannes Brahms, "Präludium in g-moll, WoO010" in *Werke für Orgel,* ed. George S. Bozarth (München, Germany: G. Henle Verlag, 1988), 8.

An easily imitated example of the second common sequence type comes in m8 (see Example 2). This sequence is another illustration of two subsequent and contrasting sequences eliding, but in this case Brahms uses a chromatically descending line as a contrast to the first sequence rather than by simply speeding up the chord changes. Although the method in this sequence is different, the root relationship continues to rely on a circle of fifths. Beginning on a G, the chromatically descending bass line descends to D, A, and E before it is slightly altered in order to cadence back on D in m9. Each of these important sequence notes is obvious in the chromatic line because they occur on the beat.

Example 2:[79]



Parallel Third & Sixth Motion:

Understanding harmonic progressions like those demonstrated in the sequences above is only part of what is needed to improvise a complete idea. It is also necessary to be able spontaneously to create a full chord to fill out the harmony. One of the most basic and satisfying ways to accomplish this is by using parallel third and sixth relationships. Brahms demonstrates this technique in both of the examples already discussed. The highest pitch of the right hand chord moves in a descending third pattern on the second half of m3 in the first example. This pattern is also linked to the corresponding bass note in the left hand because it alternates from a unison to a third relationship with the left hand pitches (see Example 3). This basic pattern is consistent for the duration of that sequence.

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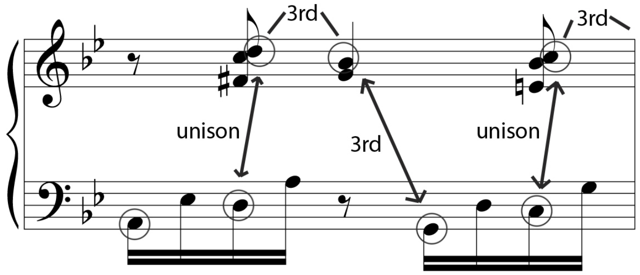
[79] Brahms, 8.

Example 3:[80]



The third and sixth relationships between the right and left hands are even clearer in the chromatic sequence of m8. Brahms demonstrates a useful tool by carefully ensuring that the manual parts are in third or sixth relationships on each beat, regardless of which notes are played between the beats. The pitches in this sequence are G and Bb on beat 1, D and F# on beat 2, A and C# on beat three, and E and C on beat 4. Having this consistent framework and aural stability is helpful for a listener; it also helps an improviser stay focused and avoid aimless wandering.

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[80] Brahms, 8.

Use of Augmented Six Chord

A third element of the G minor Präludium that serves as a great improvisation model is demonstrated in m29. In this passage Brahms has established the key as Bb minor and spent two measures on a pedal F. Rather than writing the expected authentic cadence, however, he enharmonically alters the F dominant seven chord at the end of the measure to a German six, thereby extending the phrase and transitioning into the remote key of A Major. For the harmonically astute improviser, this is an excellent example of how to extend an improvisation while simultaneously re-engaging the listener by creating an unexpected harmonic shift, as Brahms has done.

Conclusion

Even though the G minor Präludium is relatively conservative tonally, Brahms maintains the listener’s interest through flashy ascending and descending figurations, contrasting sections, large ranges, and sequences. His youthful attraction to the power and energy of the organ is demonstrated through his style of writing and use of dynamics. He also exhibits interest in understanding and expanding a musical form from the previous generation of organ composers. Furthermore, by incorporating elements such as sequences, cadences, parallel motion based on thirds and sixths, and distinctive diminished seventh and augmented six chords, all of which are easily imitated and transposed to new keys, Brahms provides an excellent romantic model for improvisation.

CHAPTER 8

IMPROVISATIONAL INSIGHTS THROUGH MUSICAL ANALYSIS: AARON COPLAND'S *SYMPHONY FOR ORGAN AND ORCHESTRA*, III. FINALE

Aaron Copland has long been described as the quintessential American composer. He is considered by many to be the pioneer of an American compositional style. Perhaps best known for his distinctive tonal pallet, Copland utilized elements of jazz, Jewish music, and folk melodies to create highly complex works that are both personal and universally appealing. His music assimilates established musical norms into innovative compositions, serving as an excellent model for modern composers and improvisers alike.

Although music listeners are most familiar with Copland's later mainstream works, aspects of his characteristic style began to emerge in his earliest pieces such as the *Symphony for Organ and Orchestra*. Because the symphony is clearly influenced by Copland's composition studies in Paris with Nadia Boulanger, it perfectly illustrates his mastery of combining old and new, merging tradition and the avant-garde. Copland's reliance on historic principles is evidenced by his own reflection that "for awhile I thought of the Organ Symphony as being too European in derivation...."[81] Nevertheless, the symphony, especially in its final movement, contains several compositional elements that came to be associated with his American idiom. The Finale is based in part on sonata form, but Copland breaks down the typical constraints while also foreshadowing his later style with the use of polytonality, tonal stasis, polyrhythm and changing meters. Later in life he again reflected on the Organ Symphony, recognizing it as "closer to my natural expressive idiom than I had realized."[82]

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[81] Niel Butterworth, *The Music of Aaron Copland* (Toccata Press, 1985), 29.

Background

Copland was born on November 14, 1900 in Brooklyn, New York, the youngest of five children. His parents were both immigrants from Lithuania, but didn't meet until they lived in New York. Copland's father owned a department store; the family worked in the store and lived in quarters above it. Although his family didn't have a strong musical background, Copland was nevertheless surrounded by what he described as "casual encounters"[83] with music in his synagogue and at home.

Copland's earliest training was at the piano with his sister Laurine. As he described it, "My parents were of the opinion that enough money had been invested in the musical training of the four older children with meager results."[84] Apparently his aptitude and perseverance eventually triumphed because he began formal instruction in the studio of Leopold Wolfsohn at the age of fourteen, and harmony lessons with Rubin Goldmark at the age of seventeen. Goldmark had been a pupil of Dvořák and was an excellent teacher of conventional theory, counterpoint, and classical forms. He imparted these important mechanics of music to Copland who diligently assimilated the valuable skills and would later innovate them with a personal identity. Of Goldmark, he remarked:

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[82] Howard Pollack, *Aaron Copland: The Life and Work of an Uncommon Man* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1999), 125.

[83] Butterworth, 14.

[84] Butterworth, 14.

> Goldmark had an excellent grasp of the fundamentals of music and knew very well how to impart his ideas. I was spared the flounderings that so many musicians have suffered through incompetent training.[85]

What Goldmark did not provide, however, was an interest in the modern music that fascinated Copland. By the time he finished high school Copland had grown restless in his circumstances and desired the freedom of expression and liberation that he believed could be found in France. He therefore saved up what money he could and sought a scholarship to a new summer music school for Americans in Fontainebleau, France, just south of Paris.

Copland received a three-month tuition scholarship to the school and left for France in June 1921 to study with Paul Vidal. Although Vidal did not provide him with the sympathetic instructor he was seeking, the atmosphere of the music scene in France was in line with his ideals. More importantly, he was quickly introduced to Nadia Boulanger who transformed both his life and career.[86]

After three years of study with Boulanger, most would agree that Copland was intellectually fulfilled, stylistically validated, and professionally empowered.

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[85] Butterworth, 15.

[86] Butterworth, 16.

Evidence of this is demonstrated in his *Symphony for Organ and Orchestra* which was begun in 1923 and finished in 1924. The work was composed for Boulanger's American debut with the New York Symphony Orchestra and the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Boulanger was a gifted organist and evidently trusted her young student's abilities by requesting he compose a symphony for her to play, despite his inexperience. The symphony was in every way indebted to Boulanger and firmly established Copland's career and presence in the American music scene.

Form & Structure

The *Symphony for Organ and Orchestra* is in three movements, a short Prelude followed by a substantial Scherzo and ending with the imposing Finale. The first two movements are essentially a pair and are relatively straightforward in structure. The Finale, however, is much more complex structurally, something that became a hallmark of Copland throughout his career. The entire work, although titled a symphony, is really a concerto in every way but name. The organ part plays for the majority of the symphony and contains several sections of solo cadenza-like passages. However, Copland justified the symphony title by claiming the organ was conceived as a part of the orchestra rather than as a solo instrument.[87]

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[87] Pollack, 126.

The Finale is the longest movement of the symphony and is somewhat overwhelming both aurally and structurally. Copland described it as being in sonata form due to four main components spread across an exposition, development, and recapitulation.[88] The first component is an opening theme based on a three-note motive outlining a minor triad. This theme is presented as a single melodic line by the violas at the beginning of the movement. The second is a new theme first played by the strings that is more energetic than the first. It is split into two parts that reoccur frequently, both together and separately. The third component is the use of ostinato bass patterns throughout the work. And finally, the fourth idea is an energetic third theme that does not enter until the development section. Each of these components is discussed in detail later in this chapter.

The primary four components are quickly recognized when looking at the score. Copland describes their presence and function in the work, yet it remains difficult to recognize a clear sonata form structure. Among other reasons, the ‘exposition’ is complex and contains nine distinct sections that occur across 129 measures. In contrast the ‘development’ has only three sections spread over almost the same number of measures, while the ‘recapitulation’ contains only two and is very short relative to the previous sections. Furthermore, there are no clear distinctions between the sonata sections, a new theme is presented in the

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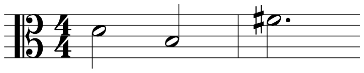
[88] Pollack, 126.

'development', and the 'recapitulation' bears little aural or structural resemblance to the exposition aside from the four primary components.

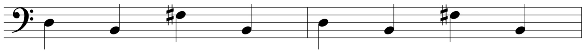
When listening to the Finale, however, a different type of structure is recognizable. Copland continuously reuses the opening three-note triad from the first theme, creating a type of varied passacaglia. Example 1 shows this theme, that recurs at the beginning of each of the following variations.

Example 1: Arpeggiated Triad[89]



Another feature that contributes to the sense of a passacaglia form is Copland's consistent use of ostinato bass patterns based on the arpeggiated triad. Example 2 shows a typical occurrence from the cello part in mm47-48.

Example 2: Ostinato Bass Pattern[90]



Despite the recurring triadic figuration and ostinato bass, the Finale is unlike a traditional passacaglia because not all of the pitches from the first theme appear in each variation. After the triad is stated at the beginning of each variation, there is noticeably different material until the subsequent variation begins.

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[89] Aaron Copland, "3. Finale" in *Symphony for Organ and Orchestra* (Boosey & Hawkes, 1964), 33.

[90] Copland, 35.

In the face of such structural ambiguity, it seems prudent to approach the Finale as a hybrid of sonata form and passacaglia. Within the three sections that Copland describes, it is possible to subdivide the entire movement into an opening theme followed by thirteen variations featuring some version of the opening broken triad. Whether intentional or not, the Finale is simultaneously a demonstration of Copland's technical mastery of form and his characteristic spontaneity of design.

Tonal & Rhythmic Considerations

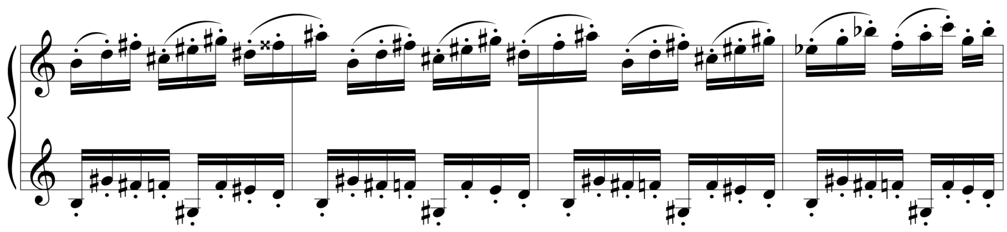
It is difficult to describe the Finale in terms of classical tonality. While it clearly begins in B Minor and ends with a strong B Major chord, no strong sense of one key is consistently present. Rather, it seems that Copland constructs each section on one or two basic broken triads. These triads are often treated in a polytonal manner, with two distinct tonalities juxtaposed.

A clear example of polytonal triadic treatment comes in the first variation in m13. The violas begin the section with a G Major triad that is quickly taken up by the second violins and second cello part. However, in the second measure of the variation (m14), a Db Major triad is introduced by the first cello part and taken up by the first violins and basses. The triads are then distributed between the different instruments throughout the rest of the variation. Although these triads are in a tritone relationship to each other, the effect is not abrasive because they are arpeggiated. In addition Copland masterfully blends them together by offsetting their entrances and using them in ostinato patterns.

During the course of the Finale, another compositional technique that Copland employs is to juxtapose two triads in a half-step relationship. Examples of this treatment and its variants come throughout the work. In variation two, for example, he uses a B minor triad in the trumpets followed immediately by a C minor in the organ pedal part (mm28-32). In the same place he also creates a two-measure sequence that outlines an Eb Major triad followed by an E Major triad.

One further example of the process of using triads in half-step relationships as building blocks comes near the end of the Finale. In mm210-213, Copland incorporates sequencing and rising triads in the right hand of the organ part over an ostinato bass in the left hand. These measures also contain an important rhythmic component. The right hand material is grouped into three subsets of triads that are repeated three times. Meanwhile, the bass contains four groupings of two, four-note patterns. Because there are two rhythms happening simultaneously, this compositional technique is known as polyrhythm (see Example 3). As with polytonality, polyrhythm is a hallmark of Copland's style that is prevalent in many of his compositions.

Example 3: Polyrhythm[91]



In spite of its polytonal complexity, the Finale conveys a sense of tonal stasis to most listeners. Although there are many complex chords and tonalities, attention is consistently drawn to repetitive statements of a broken triad. B minor is especially prominent among the many triads Copland uses, appearing in some form in eleven of the fourteen sections. The dominance of this triad throughout the piece and its statement in the first three notes give a strong sense of B minor as the tonal center. Furthermore, the irrepressible repetition of B minor also keeps much of the piece suspended in a single tonality.

Building Blocks

It was pointed out above that Copland uses four basic components to construct the Finale. He associated these in a loose sonata form, but even the most informed listener has difficulty distinguishing this over-arching framework. Each of the components functions on its own, drawing the listener's attention and bringing cohesion to the work as a whole.

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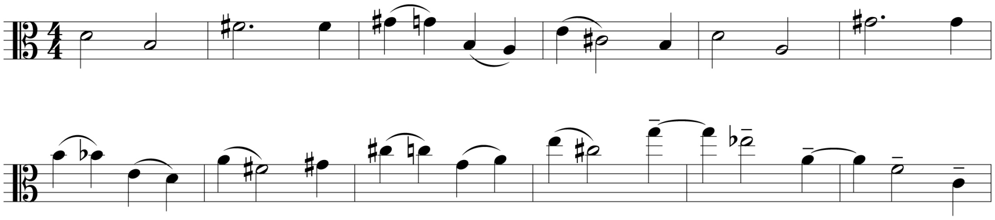
[91] Copland, 47.

The first theme is presented as a single line by the violas at the beginning of the Finale. A sense of tonality is created from the first three pitches (outlining a B minor triad), but the subsequent pitches incorporate many accidentals. Tonality is further obscured by the expanding figurations that begin as a triad in mm1-2 and are widened to form a major seventh in mm5-6. Copland then continues the upward momentum of the expanded figuration, reaching a climax in mm11-12 on a high G before quickly falling back to B for the start of the next section (see Example 4).

Example 4: Theme 1[92]



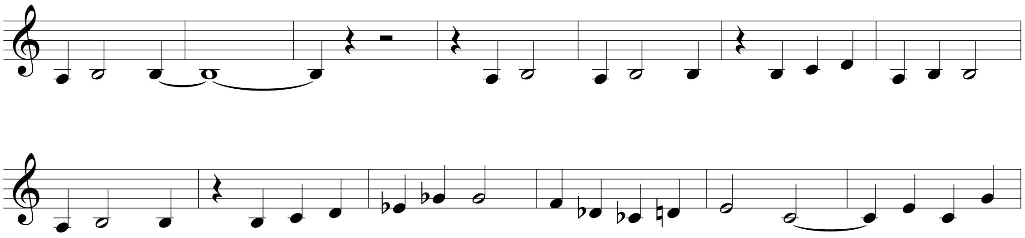
The first theme does not reappear in its entirety during the remainder of the Finale. Copland masterfully incorporates elements of it throughout the movement, with falling seconds and large leaps. As has already been discussed, the triadic motive outlined in the first three pitches is the primary building block of the entire work. It appears in canon, diminution and augmentation. It is also the basis for many of the ostinato figurations he uses extensively throughout the symphony (see Example 5).

---

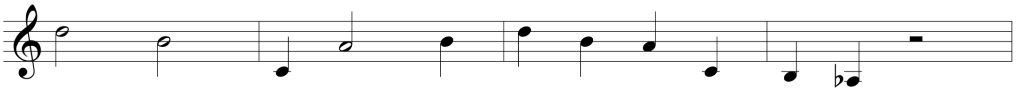
[92] Copland, 33.

The second theme is longer than the first and can be split into two parts. It is first stated in the third variation (mm41-60) but does not return as a complete unit in subsequent variations. The first half of the theme (see Example 5) is not very interesting melodically, hovering around two pitches for most its duration. Its primary function is to convey a strong and insistent rhythmic idea that gains momentum as it progresses. The second half of the theme (see Example 6) is not long but contains a sweeping melody whose scope and nature is in direct contrast to the first half of the theme.

Example 5: Theme 2a, Measures 43-55[93]



Example 6: Theme 2b, Measures 56-59 [94]



The third theme does not appear until the development at the end of the ninth variation (mm156-162). Like the first theme, it is initially based on a B-minor triad, however, at a much faster pace with ornamental grace notes (Example 7). This theme is has strong connections to Jewish dance motives and brings a new energy to the movement. The first measure is repeated in many ways after the initial statement and is often treated in diminution, further enhancing the energy. The triadic motive of Theme 3, like that of Theme 1, is transposed into several other distantly related triads.

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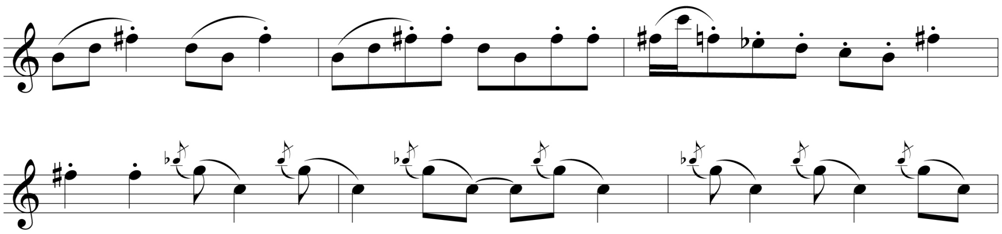
[93] Copland, 35.

[94] Copland, 36.

Example 7: Theme 3, Measures 156-161[95]



Assimilate

Copland uses many classically derived methods in the Finale, such as sequences, repetitions, diminution, augmentation, and canon. His skill in applying these techniques was undoubtedly honed to perfection during his time in France with Nadia Boulanger. In the *Symphony for Organ and Orchestra,* he assimilates the concepts by infusing them with his own unique approach to sound rather than using them to create links with earlier compositional styles.

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[95] Copland, 43.

An excellent example of this is the elaborate polytonal setting of a sequencing canon in mm214-222 (see score). The canon begins with the second half of Theme 2 in the right hand of the organ and is followed by the oboes a half measure later. The first half of the canon centers around B; then after four and a half measures it sequences up a half step to center around C#. Meanwhile the left hand of the organ is playing an ostinato figuration based on three rising pitches--Eb F and G--alternating with the B below. Because the ostinato shares only a few pitches with the canon and does not change during the course of the entire canon, polytonality is created.

While Copland's mastery of form may be daunting, even the beginning improviser can find ideas to imitate. Following are three basic musical ideas from the Finale that can serve as foundational improvisation techniques.

1. Structure

The analysis reveals a hybrid structure between variation and sonata form in the Finale. This is presented visually in the structural diagram at the end of the chapter. Following Copland's example, a similar structural diagram can be created for use in improvising. Having a clear road map prevents the beginning improviser from wandering aimlessly; simultaneously, it provides an organizational framework that will eventually become assimilated into the player's improvising. Example 8 is one example of what might result from a consideration of Copland's themes, durations and dynamics.

Example 8: Possible Structural Diagram for Improvising based on Copland's Finale

	Exposition			
Variation	Theme	Variation 1	Variation 2	Variation 3
Theme	Theme 1	Motive A	Motive B	Motive A & B
Measures	8	8	8	8
Dynamic	*mf*	*p*	*mp*	*f*

	Development	
Variation	Variation 4	Variation 5
Theme	Theme 2 with Motive A	Theme 2 with Motive B
Measures	16	16
Dynamic	*pp*	*mf*

	Recapitulation	**Coda**
Variation	Variation 6	Variation 7
Theme	Theme 1	Theme 1 & 2
Measures	8	8
Dynamic	*mf*	*ff*

2. Theme & Motive

In the Finale Copland incorporates thematic material from three separate themes. It is important to realize, however, that he doesn't continue to use the three themes in their entirety. Rather, he extracts distinctive motives from the themes upon which to base the composition. For example, as pointed out in the analysis above, his first theme is only stated in its entirety once. Thereafter, Copland uses only the first three pitches, outlining a triad. Additionally, he states a second theme but proceeds to split it into two parts.

The structural diagram above demonstrates a similar approach to Copland's in the use of themes. In order to simplify the improvisation, two themes are used instead of three. As in previous chapters the improviser should once again look to well-known melodies or hymn tunes for material. Once a melody is selected, the next step is to devise two distinctive phrases and prepare them within the outlined structure. In the early stages it is wise to look for themes that use triadic and step-wise motion similar to that heard in Copland's Finale. Doing so will allow the player to draw more parallels to the composed example.

3. Tonality

It has already been shown that Copland obscures the tonality in the Finale. However, through the use of the triadic based motive within ostinato bass patterns he demonstrates a clever technique. The ostinato patterns provide a tonal foundation that is very flexible because of its forward momentum and open texture. These same features also make the ostinato pattern flexible for modulation. With a foundation like this in place, it is easy to layer other motivic and thematic material that explores extremes of dynamic, texture and tonality. The resulting improvisation should, like Copland's composed work, have an open and free aesthetic while still maintaining a concise and intentional structure.

Conclusion

The Finale from Aaron Copland's *Symphony for Organ and Orchestra* is an ambitious work that demonstrates the composer's technical genius and idiomatic distinction. It has great historical significance because with its first performance it established him firmly in the mainstream American music scene. Just as importantly, however, it demonstrates his ability to synthesize fundamentals of traditional musical composition with individualized ideas and sonorities. Like Copland, improvisers who diligently strive for this type of assimilation will be capable of innovative music making that is not only successful, but deeply and unmistakably personal.

Structural Structural Diagram of Symphony for Organ & Orchestra, III. Finale by Aaron Copland

	Exposition								
Variation	Theme	Var. 1	Var. 2	Var. 3	Var. 4	Var. 5	Var. 6	Var. 7	Var. 8
Measures	m. 1-13	m. 13-28	m. 28-41	m. 41-60	m. 61-68	m. 68-77	m. 78-99	m. 100-112	m. 113-129
Root Triads	B minor	G Major Db Major	Eb & E Major B & C minor	B minor	F# minor F minor	B minor	Bb minor	Bb minor	B minor
Components	1. Solo viola	1. Th. 1 in canon in strings	1. Th. 1 in brass and organ	1. Th. 2 over 2. Th. 1 in ostinato bass	1. Th. 2 in organ	1. Th. 1 in organ pedal ostinato 2. Th. 2 in organ manual	1. Th. 1 in woodwinds in augmentation and canon 2. Canon order reversed half-way 3. Th. 2 in violas 4. Th. 1 in cellos	1. Th. 2a in organ 2. Th. 1 in bass ostinato	1. Th. 1 in augmentation

	Development		
Variation	Var. 9	Var. 10	Var. 11
Measures	m. 130-161	m. 162-202	m.202-235
Root Triads	B minor	Eb minor B minor	G# minor G Major
Components	1. Th. 1 in solo violin 2. Th. 2b in organ 3. Th. 3 in solo violin	1. Th. 1 in augmenta-tion 2. Th. 3 in diminution 3. Th. 2b in diminution	1. Th. 1 in violins 2. Th. 3 in diminution 3. Th. 2b in canon between woodwinds and organ 4. Th. 3 in canon in horns

	Recapitulation	Coda
Variation	Var. 12	Var. 13
Measures	m. 235-256	m. 257-265
Root Triads	B minor	Bb minor B Major
Components	All four elements return in juxtaposition	Th. 1 in augmentation

CONCLUSION

The craft of improvisation at the organ has enjoyed a strong resurgence in performance and pedagogy in the 21st century. This trend is benefiting the overall understanding and musicality of modern organists because of the symbiotic relationship between the skills of improvising and realization of scores. The act of improvising carries its own reward, but when historical and practical contexts are intentionally incorporated into the learning process, players will also discover deeper insights into composed music, heightened comprehension and interpretation of musical elements, and greater ability to conscientiously absorb all music.

Improvising, as in language learning, is best facilitated when examples are imitated, resulting in assimilation and innovation. Just as when learning a spoken language, musicians imitate musical models and learn to assimilate them for expressive purposes. Once proficient in using a musical idiom, the musician is able to engage in meaningful musical “conversations.” Improvisation is an important tool for contemporary organists who wish to transcend the act of interpreting composed music in their search for balanced and relevant performances. Rather than undermining the role of notated music, however, this project seeks to establish the importance of composed music as a source of stylistic and structural models for improvisation.

The first step in developing the skill of improvisation is harmonic fluency for the musical style being emulated. This task can be achieved through a systematic approach to harmonization as demonstrated by Sietze de Vries and discussed in chapter 3. De Vries's method is successful and transferable because it relies on a sequence of progressively difficult techniques that build upon each other.

The next, and congruent, step in developing proficiency at improvisation is analysis of simple musical ideas from representative compositions. This paper provides examples of purposeful imitation. Each of the chosen compositions can be broken down into relatively basic musical concepts that combine to make beautiful music that is intellectually satisfying as well. Once these ideas are recognized and isolated they can easily be practiced and merged with other learned components.

Composers of the caliber of Bach, Brahms and Copland synthesized some of the best musical ideas of preceding traditions into distinctive sonorities. Their ability to understand and then to expand upon former musical styles provides a strong incentive to modern musicians. The musical legacy preserved in the compositions of outstanding composers serves as a road map leading towards musical innovation through improvisation.

This paper is intended to provide a starting point for creative and individualized music making. The methodical approach described here focuses on learning theory, developing forms, and expanding creativity. Hopefully, this work can make the joys and benefits of improvisation accessible to all organists, regardless of age or experience.

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APPENDIX A

ANALYSIS OF WALTHER'S CONCERTO IN B MINOR - I. ALLEGRO[96]

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[96] Johann Gottfried Walther, *Organ Concertos Based on Old Masters,* ed. Wolfgang Auler (Prag, Germany: Bärenreiter Kassel, 1979).

Nr. 3. Concerto del Sigr. Meck,

appropriato all' Organo

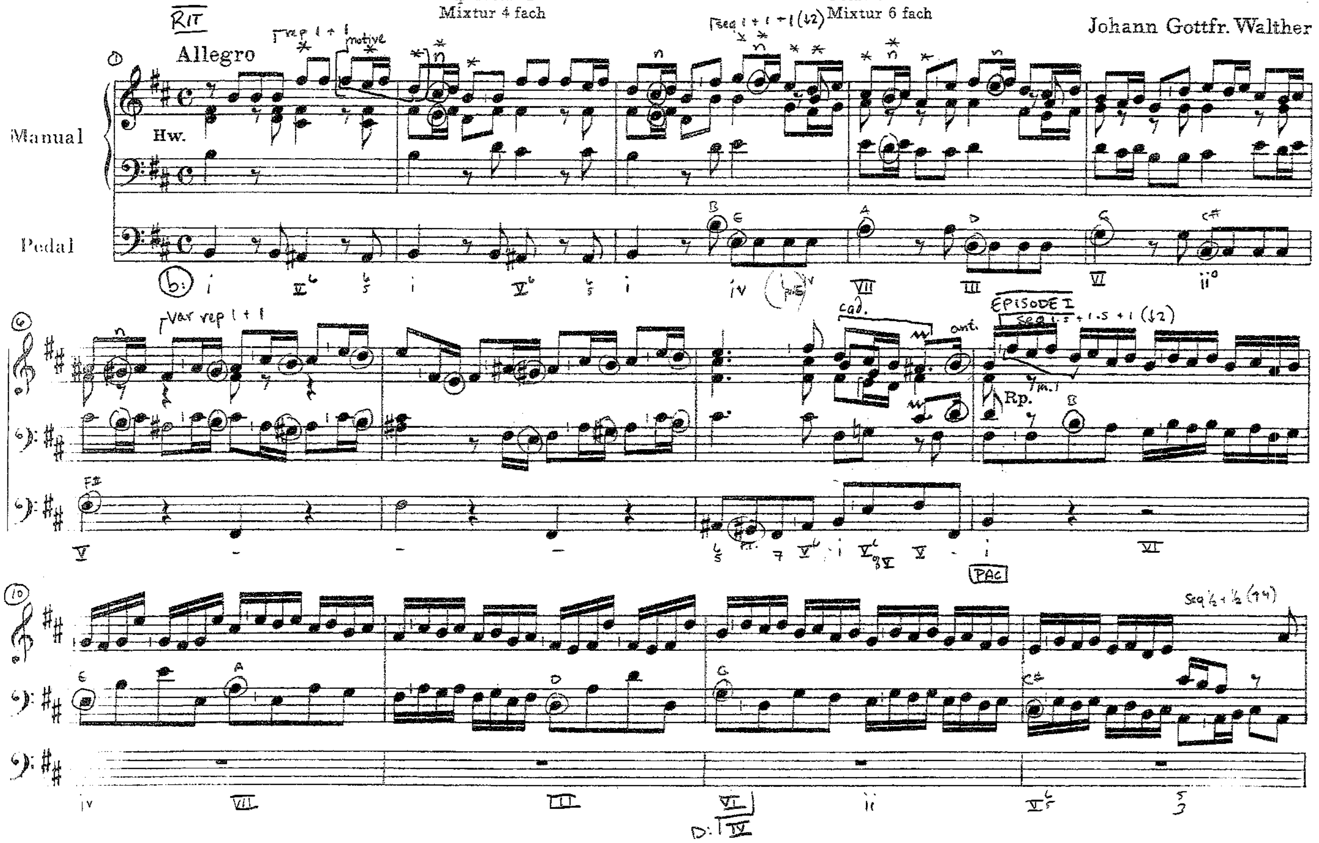
* = descending/ascending scale degrees

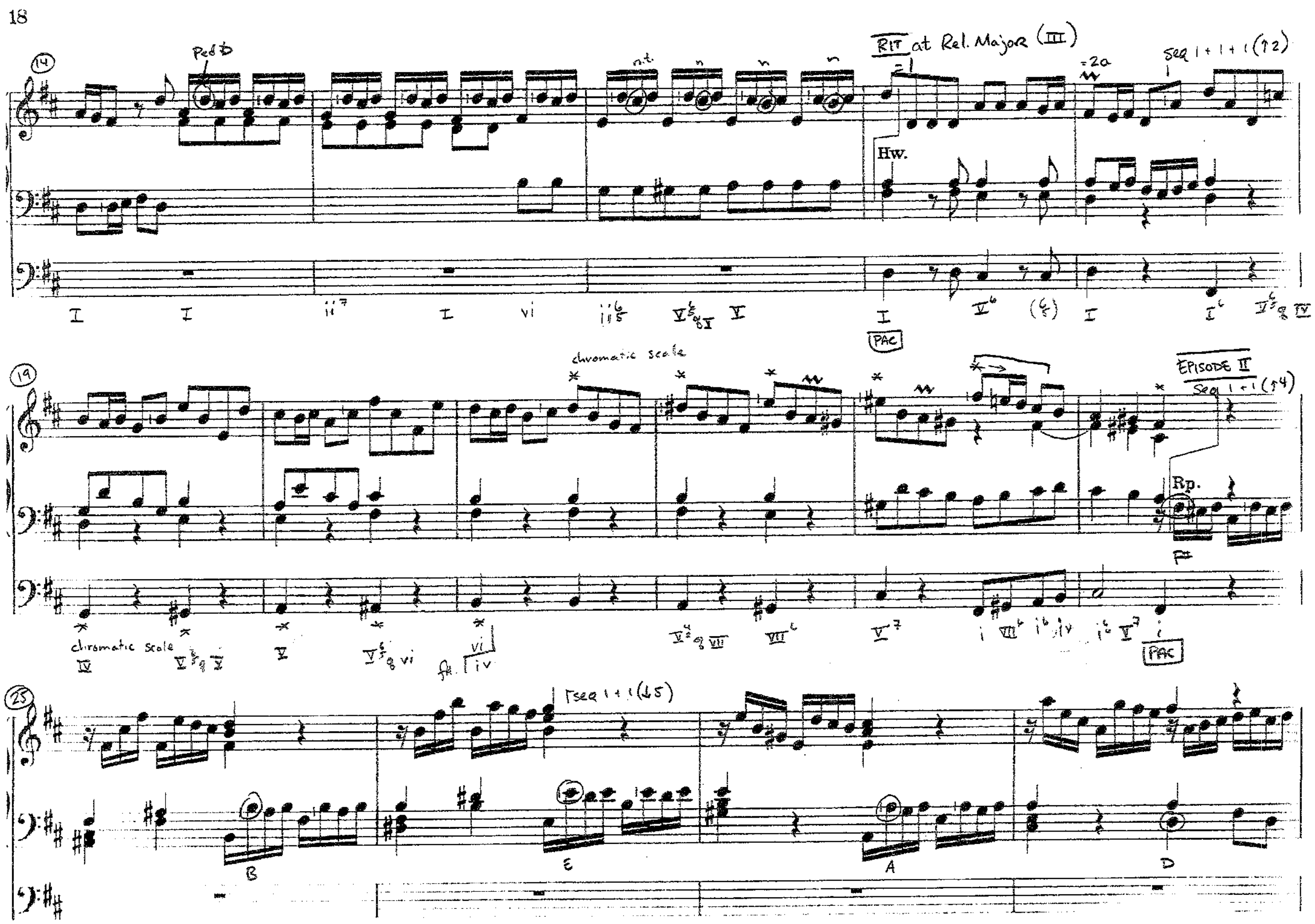
Hw.: Prinzipal 8'
Octav 4'
Superoctav 2'
Mixtur 4 fach

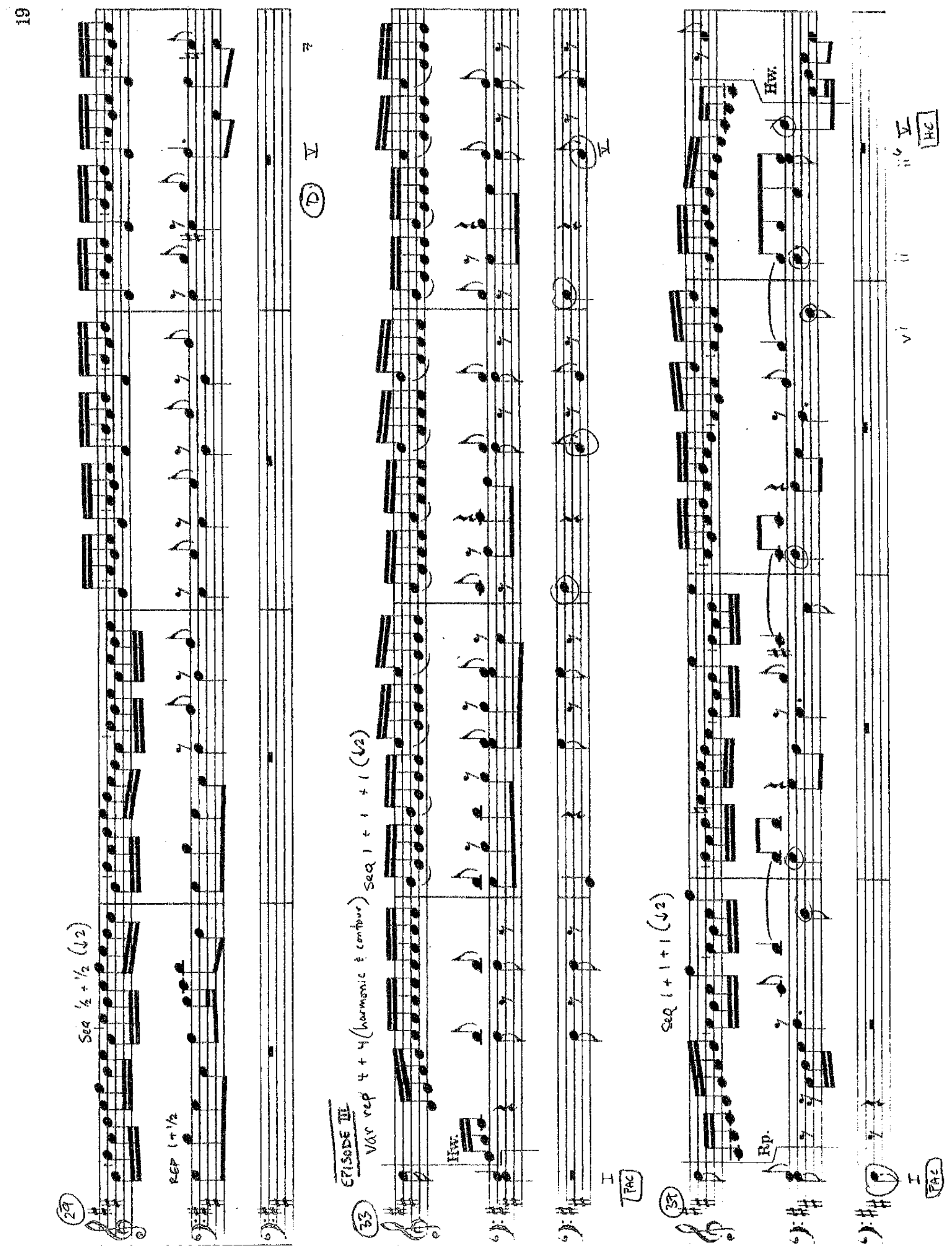
Rp.: Gedackt 8
Octav 2'

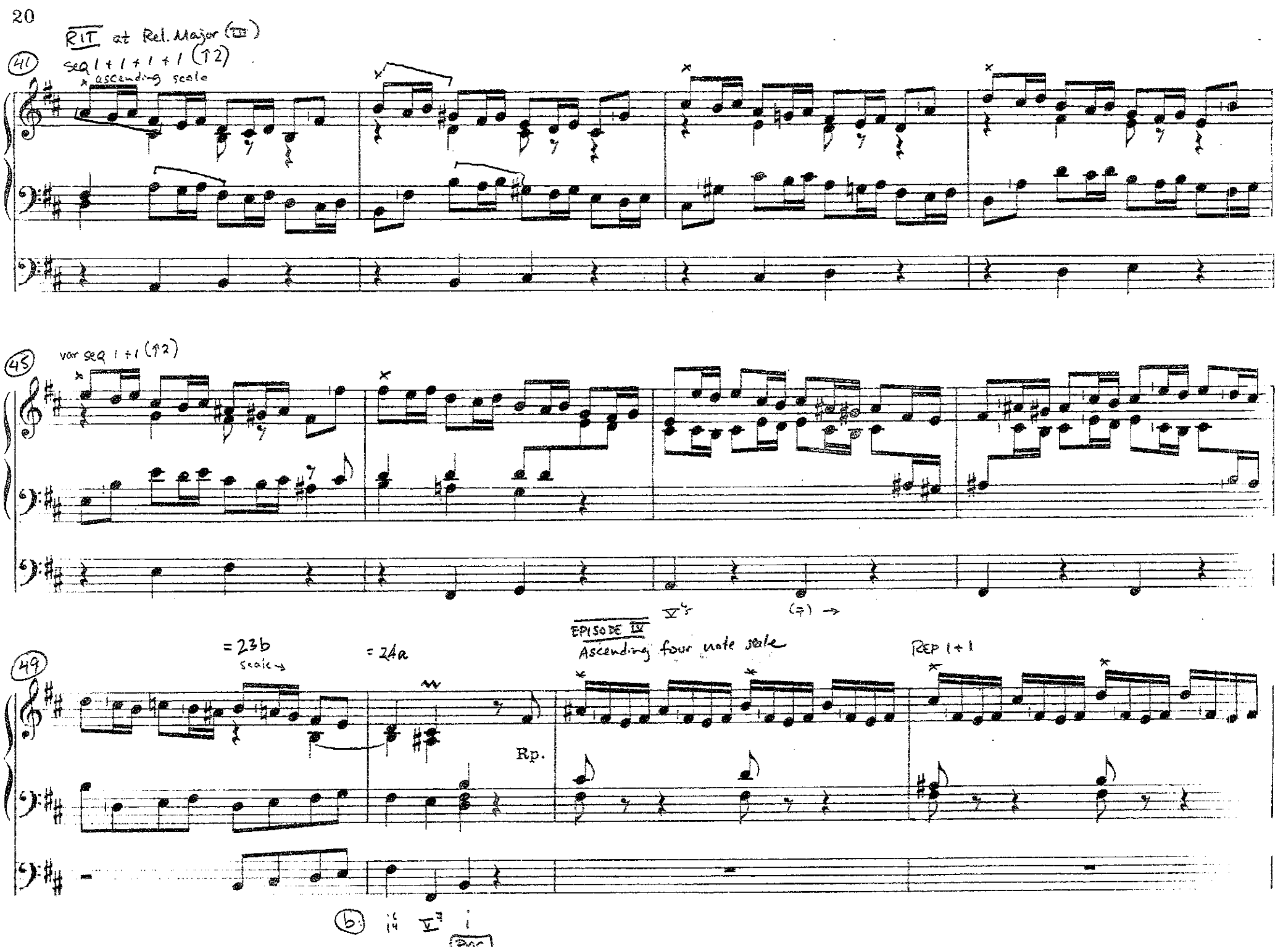
Ped.: Posaune 16'
Trompete 8'
Octav 4'
Mixtur 6 fach

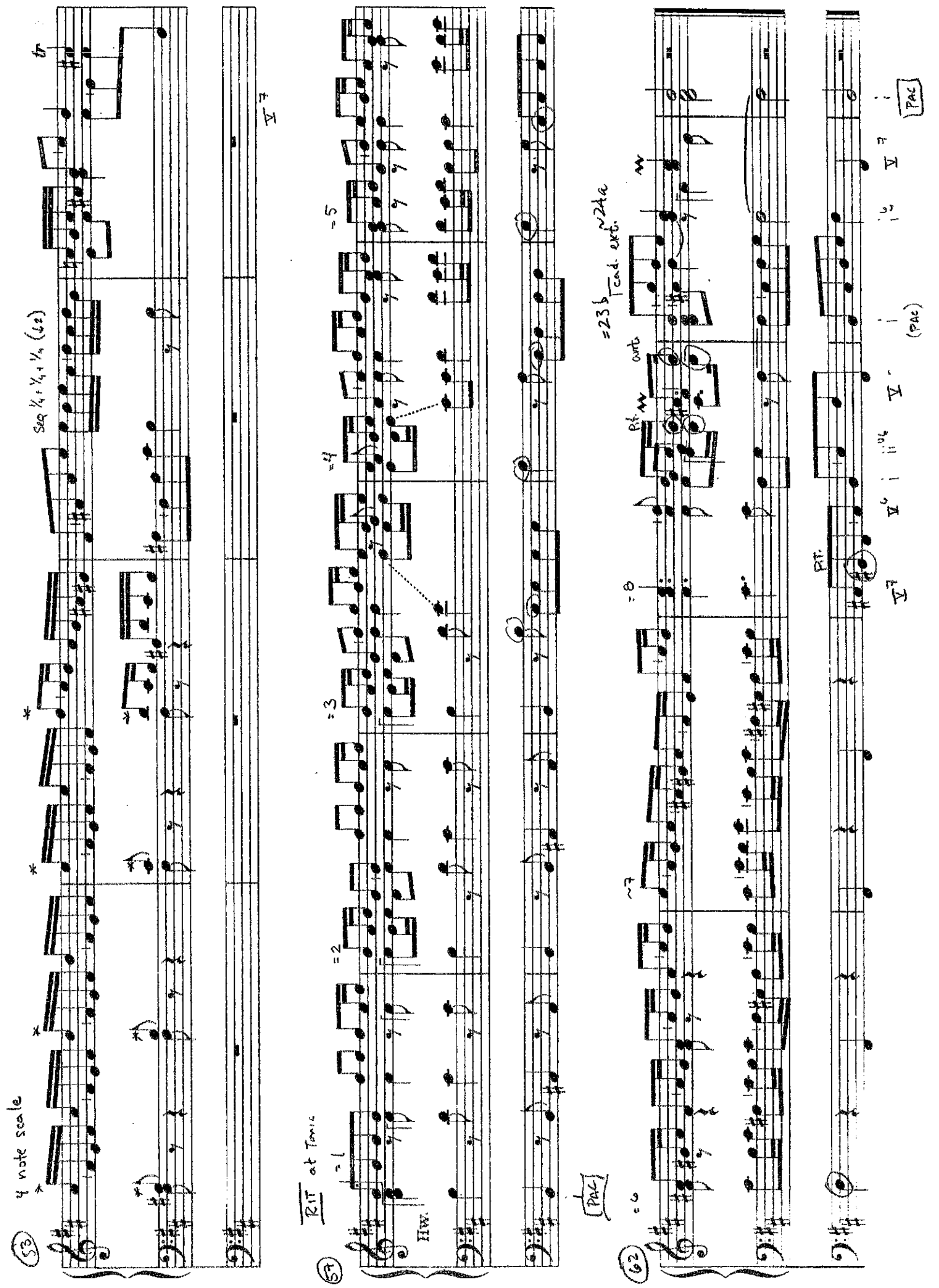
Johann Gottfr. Walther


RIT
Allegro
Manual
Hw.
Pedal
rep 1 + 1
motive
seq 1 + 1 + 1 (↓2)
b: i
V⁶
iv
VII
III
VI
ii°
var rep 1 + 1
cad.
ant.
EPISODE I
Rp.
PAC
seq ½ + ½ (↑4)
D: IV


18
14
Ped ♭
n.t.
n
n
n
RIT at Rel. Major (III)
Hw.
=2a
Seq 1+1+1 (↑2)
I
I
ii7
I
vi
ii6 5
V6 5 of V
V
I
PAC
V6
(6 4)
I
I6
V6 5 of IV
19
chromatic scale
Episode II
Seq 1+1 (↑4)
Rp.
chromatic scale
IV
V6 5 of V
V
V6 5 of vi
vi
fr. iv
V4 2 of VII
VII6
V7
i
VII6
i6
iv
i6 4
V7
i
PAC
25
Seq 1+1 (↓5)
B
E
A
D


19
29
Seq ½ + ½ (↓2)
Rep 1 + ½
D
V
33
EPISODE III
Var rep 4 + 4 (harmonic & contour) Seq 1 + 1 + 1 (↓2)
Hw.
I
PAC
V
37
Seq 1 + 1 + 1 (↓2)
Rp.
Hw.
I
PAC
V
PAC


20
41
RIT at Rel. Major (III)
seq 1 + 1 + 1 + 1 (↑2)
ascending scale
45
var seq 1 + 1 (↑2)
49
= 23b
scale →
= 24a
Rp.
EPISODE IV
Ascending four note scale
V4/3
(7) →
REP 1 + 1
b: i6/4 V7 i


53
4 note scale
Seq 1/4 + 1/4 + 1/4 (62)
V7
57
RIT at Tonic
=1
=2
=3
=4
=5
IIw.
PAC
62
=6
=7
=8
Pt.
ant.
=23½
cad. ext.
~24a
RT.
V7
V6
V
(PAC)
V7
PAC

APPENDIX B

ANALYSIS OF BACH'S FUGUE IN G MAJOR, BWV 541[97]

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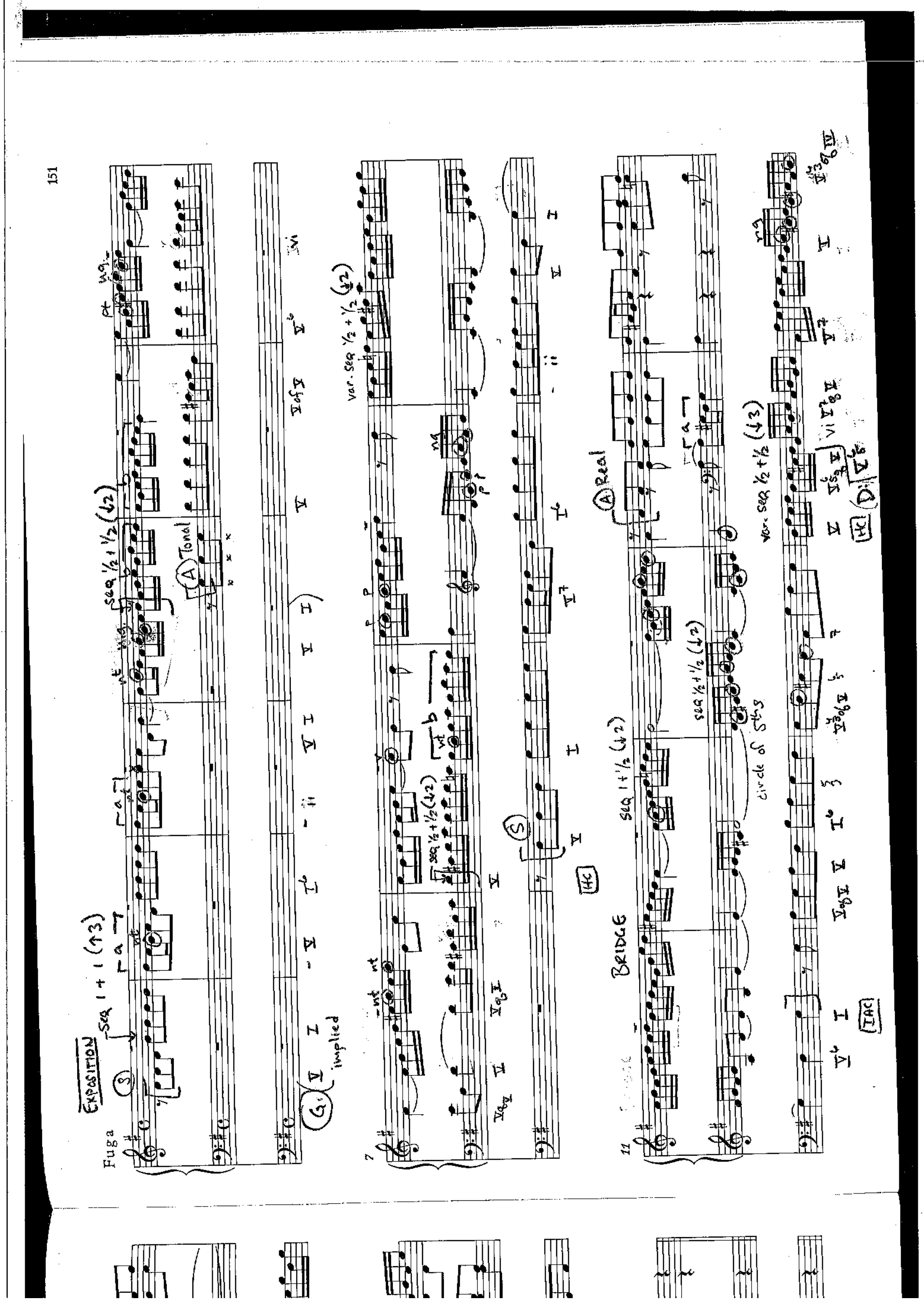
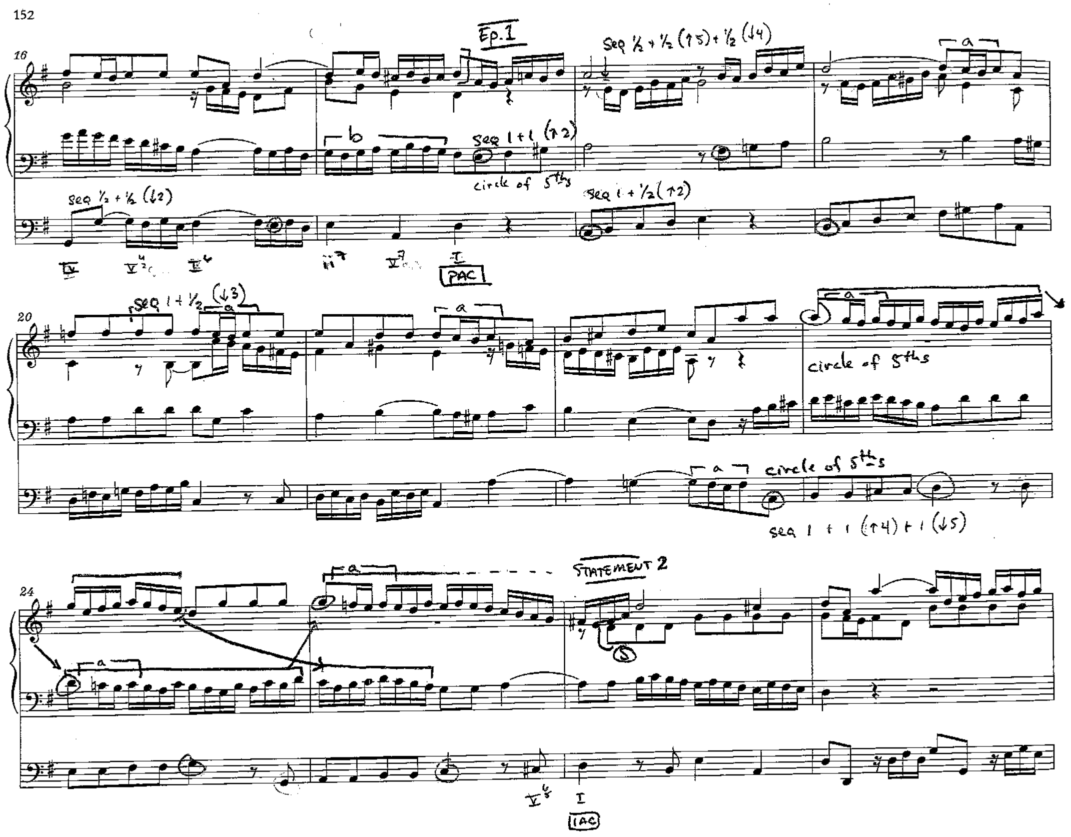
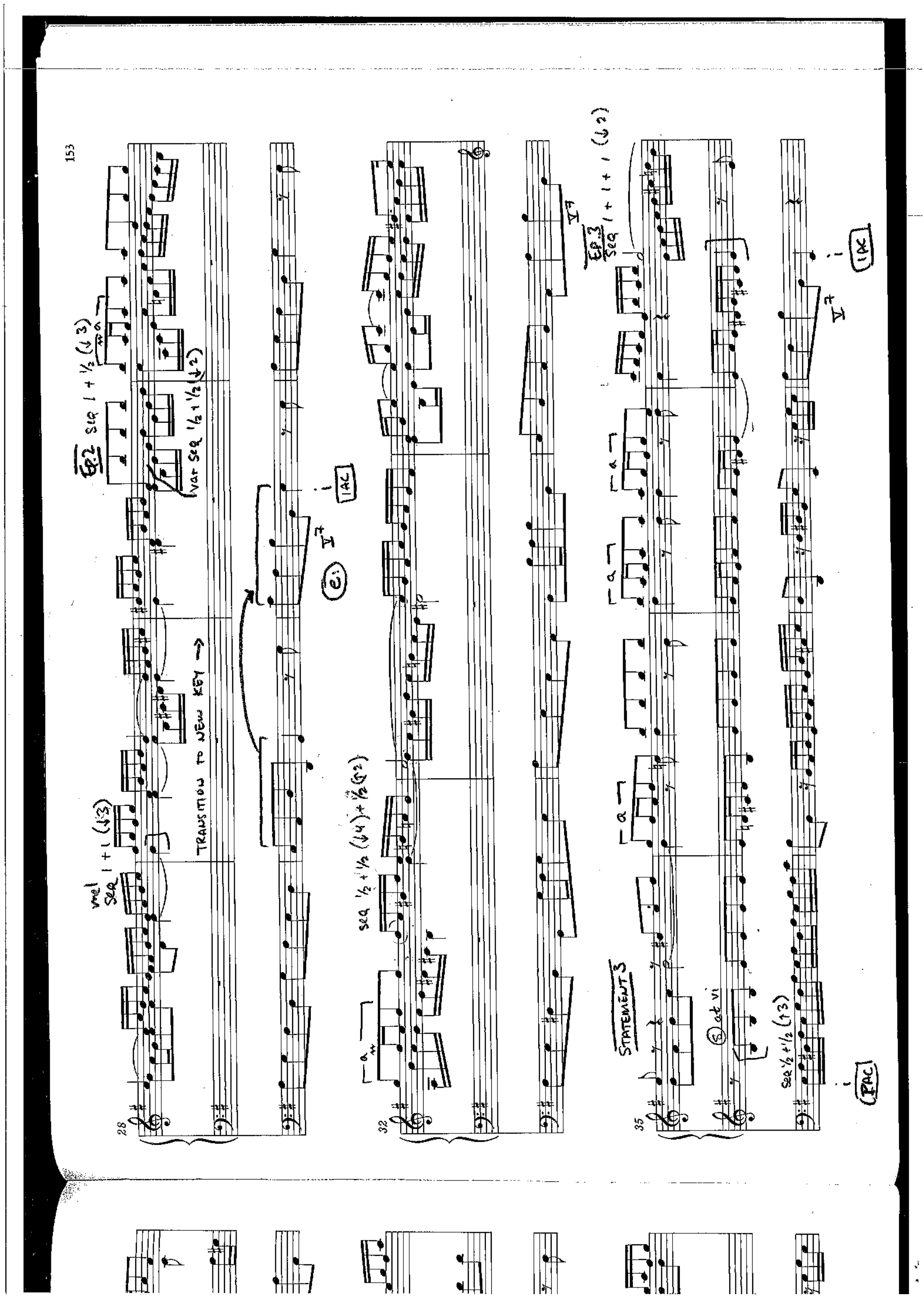
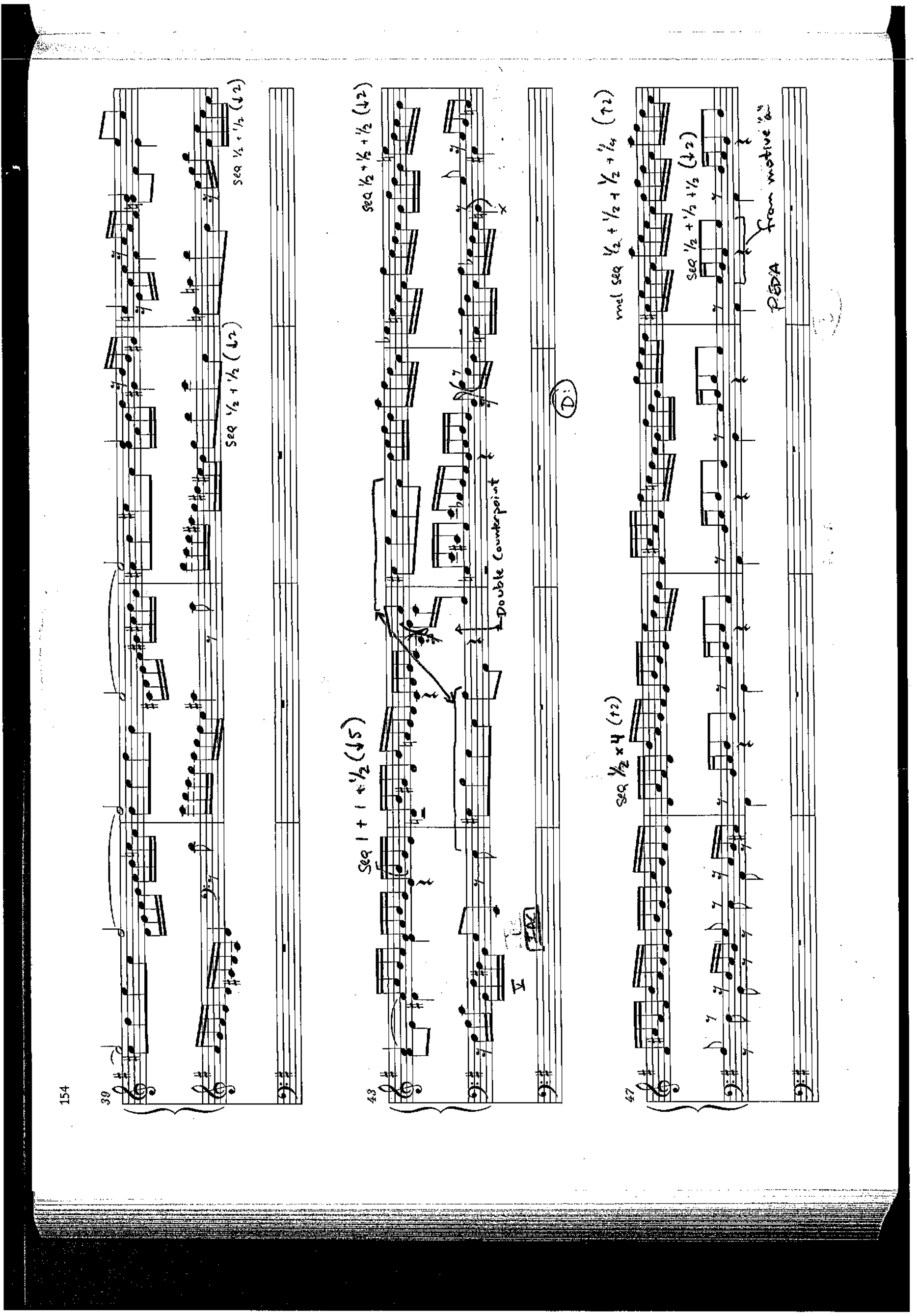
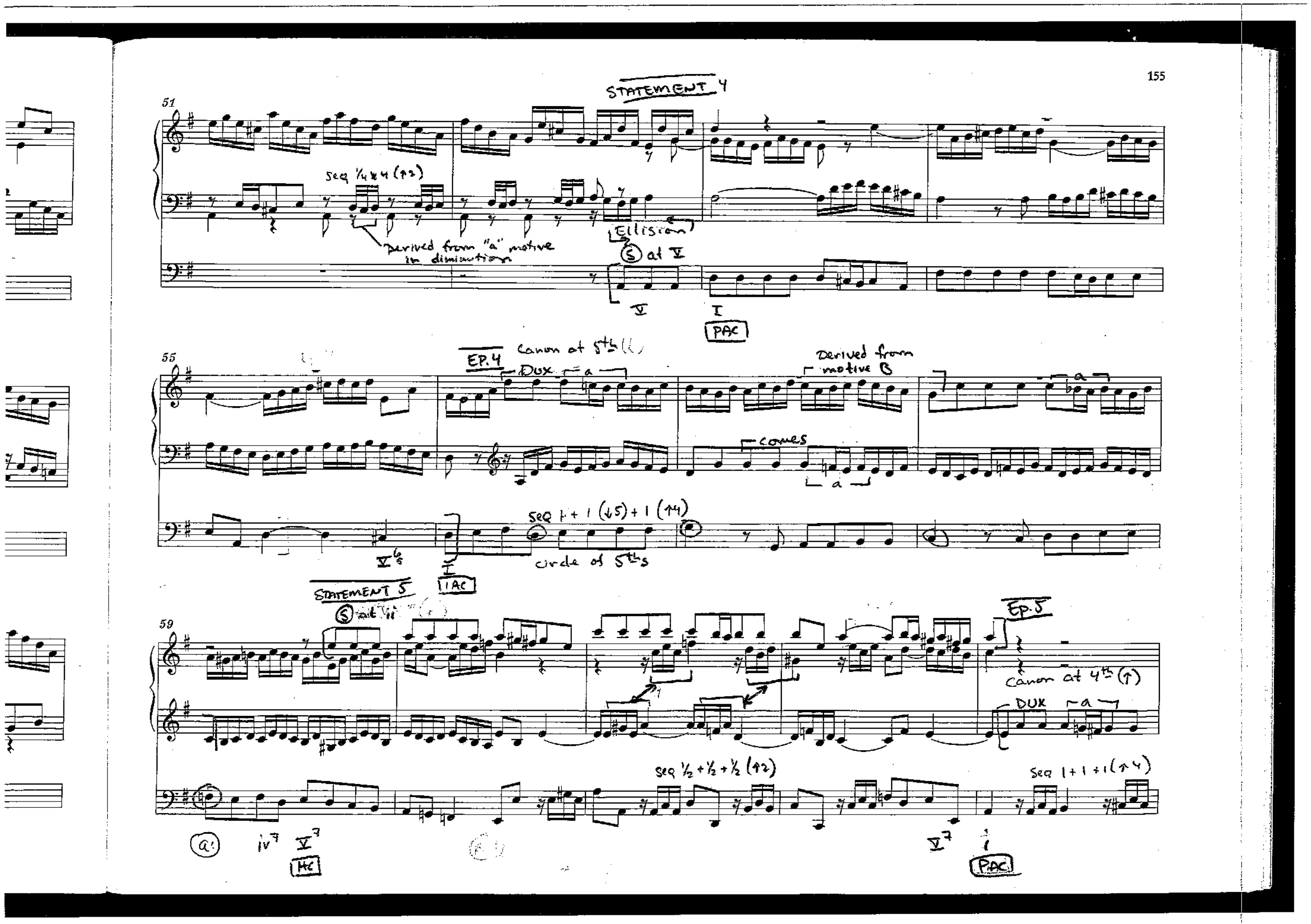
[97] Johann Sebastian Bach, "Fugue in G Major," BWV 541, in *Orgelwerke: Band 5,* ed. Dietrich Kilian (Kassel, Germany: Bärenreiter, 1972).

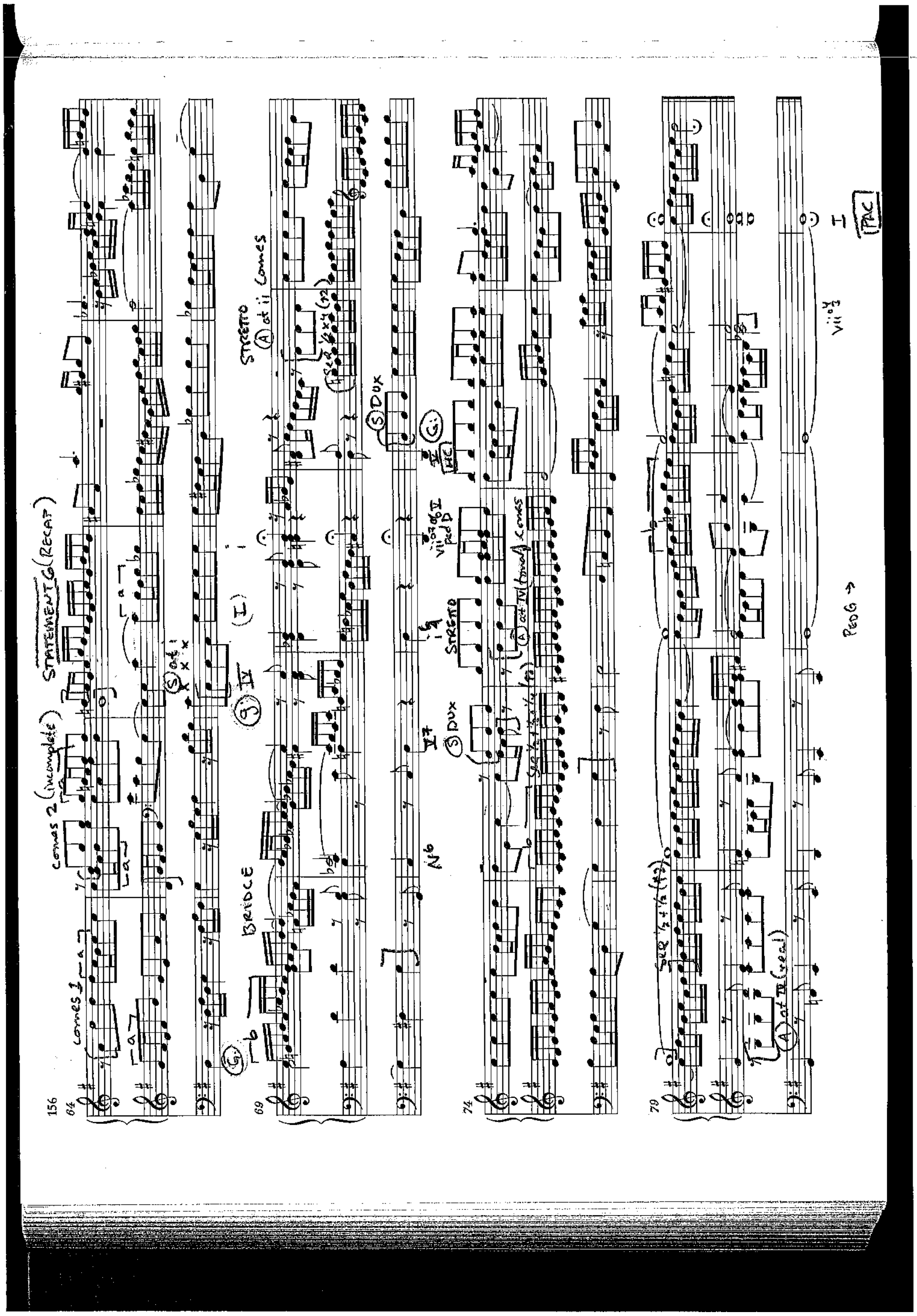

151
Fuga
EXPOSITION
S
seq 1 + 1 (↑3)
a
nt
pt
ng
seq ½ + ½ (↓2)
A Tonal
G: I
implied
I⁶
V of V
vi
7
var. seq ½ + ½ (↓2)
seq ½ + ½ (↓2)
b
S
HC
11
BRIDGE
seq 1 + ½ (↓2)
A Real
seq ½ + ½ (↓2)
circle of 5ths
var. seq ½ + ½ (↓3)
IAC
HC
D:


152
16
Ep.1
Seq ½ + ½ (↑5) + ½ (↓4)
a
b
Seq 1 + 1 (↑2)
circle of 5ths
Seq ½ + ½ (↓2)
Seq 1 + ½ (↑2)
IV
V4/2
I6
ii7
V7
I
PAC
20
Seq 1 + ½ (↓3)
a
a
a
circle of 5ths
a
circle of 5ths
Seq 1 + 1 (↑4) + 1 (↓5)
24
a
a
STATEMENT 2
S
V6/5
I
IAC


153
28
mel seq 1 + 1 (♭3)
TRANSITION TO NEW KEY →
Ep 2 seq 1 + 1/2 (♭3)
var seq 1/2 + 1 1/2 (♭2)
e: V7
IAC
32
seq 1/2 + 1/2 (♭4) + 1/2 1/2 (♭2)
a
V7
35
STATEMENT 3
S at vi
seq 1/2 + 1/2 (♭3)
PAC
a
a
a
Ep 3 seq 1 + 1 + 1 (♭2)
V7
IAC


154
39
seq 1/2 + 1/2 (↓2)
seq 1/2 + 1/2 (↓2)
43
seq 1 + 1 + 1/2 (↓5)
Double Counterpoint
I
PAC
seq 1/2 + 1/2 + 1/2 (↓2)
D:
47
seq 1/2 × 4 (↑2)
mel seq 1/2 + 1/2 + 1/2 + 1/4 (↑2)
seq 1/2 + 1/2 + 1/2 (↓2)
PEDA
from motive "a"


155
51
STATEMENT 4
Seq ¼ + ¼ (↓2)
Derived from "a" motive in diminution
Ellision
Ⓢ at V
V
I
PAC
55
EP. 4
Canon at 5th (↓)
Dux
a
comes
a
Derived from motive B
a
Seq 1 + 1 (↓5) + 1 (↑4)
circle of 5ths
V6
I
IAC
59
STATEMENT 5
Ⓢ
Ep. 5
Canon at 4th (↑)
DUX
a
Seq ½ + ½ + ½ (↓2)
Seq 1 + 1 + 1 (↑4)
a:
iv7
V7
HC
V7
i
PAC


156
64
Comes 1
Comes 2 (incomplete)
STATEMENT 6 (RECAP)
a
(S) at i
G:
BRIDGE
IV
I
69
STRETTO
(A) at ii Comes
(S) DUX
G:
V
HC
N6
I7
(S) DUX
74
STRETTO
vii°4/3 of I
ped D
(A) at IV (tonal) Comes
79
(A) at III (real)
PEDG
vii°7
I
PAC

APPENDIX C

ANALYSIS OF JOHANNES BRAHMS'S PRÄLUDIUM IN G-MOLL, WoO010[98]

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[98] Johannes Brahms, "Präludium in g-moll, WoO010" in *Werke für Orgel,* ed. George S. Bozarth (München, Germany: G. Henle Verlag, 1988).

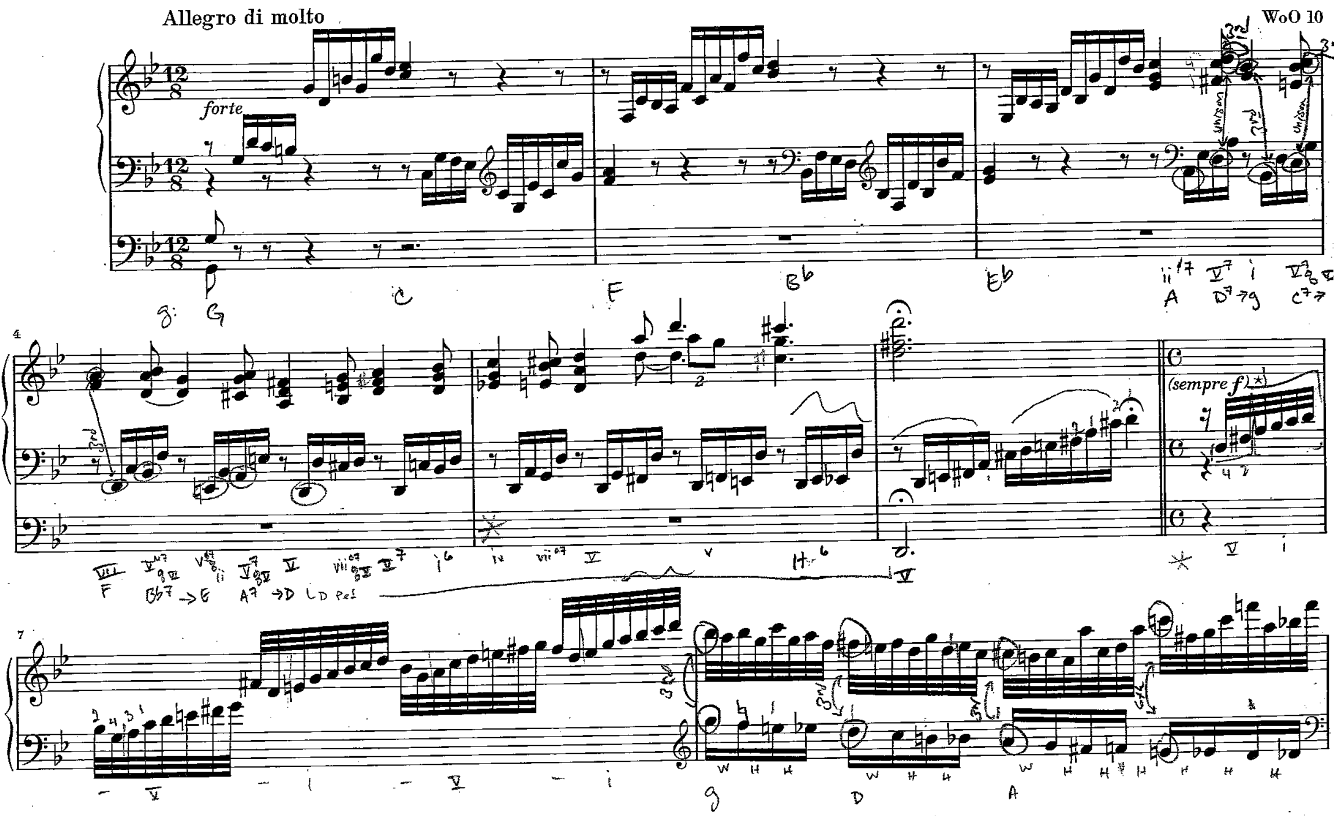
Präludium und Fuge

(7.5 min)

in g-moll

Komponiert 1857

WoO 10

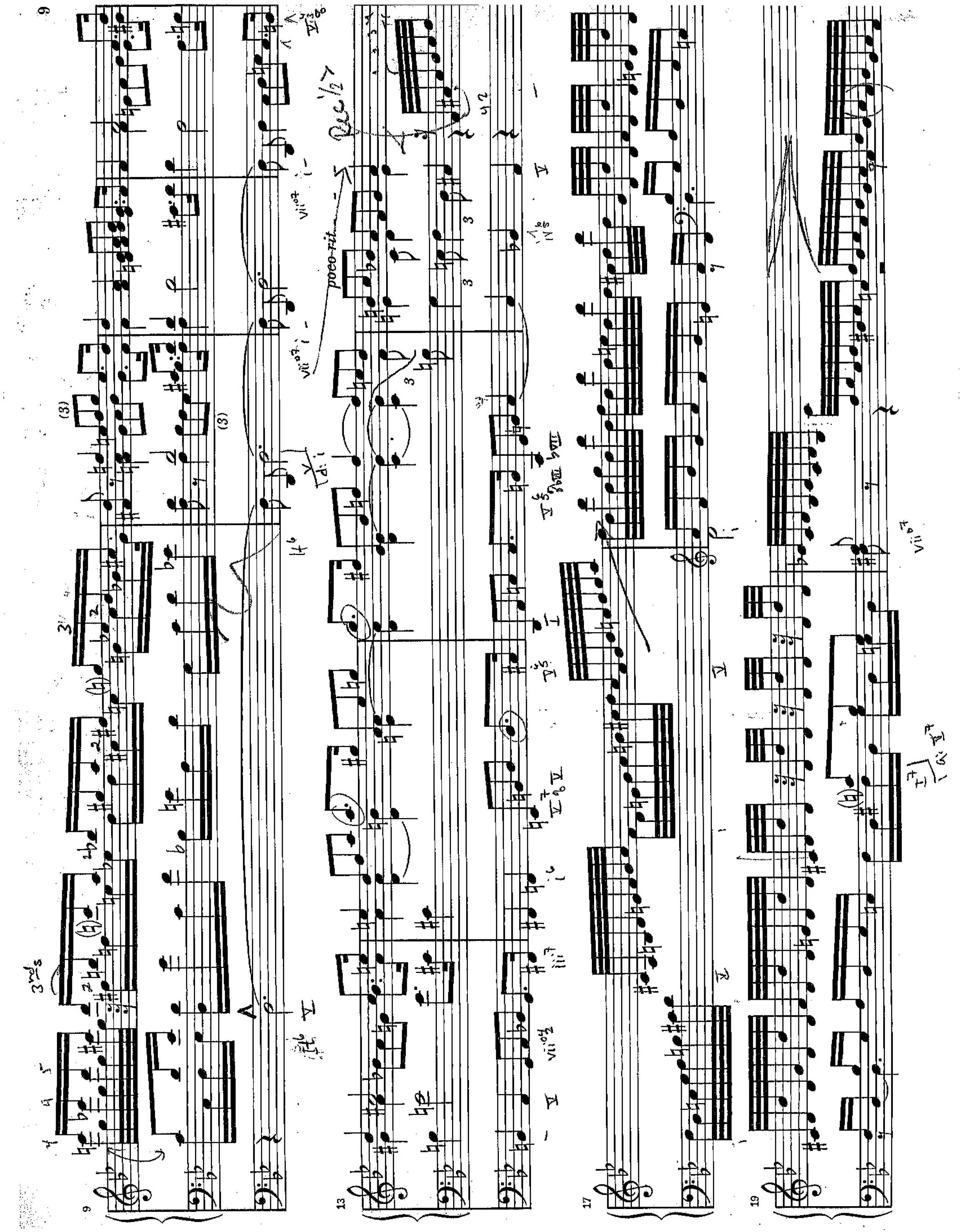

Allegro di molto
forte
unison
unison
g: G
C
F
B♭
E♭
A
D⁷→g
C⁷→
(sempre f)*)
F
B♭⁷→E
A⁷→D
LD Ped
g
D
A

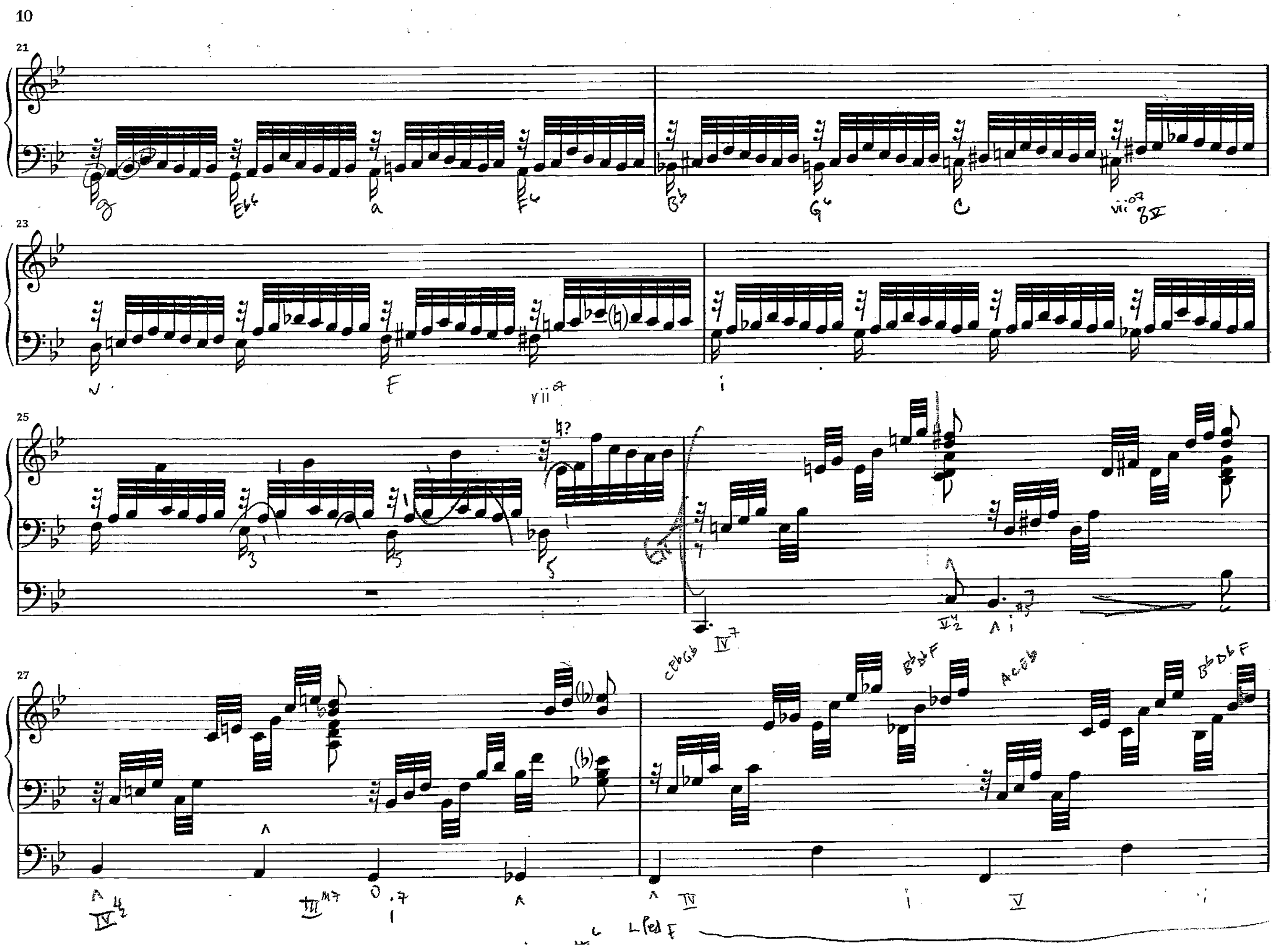
---

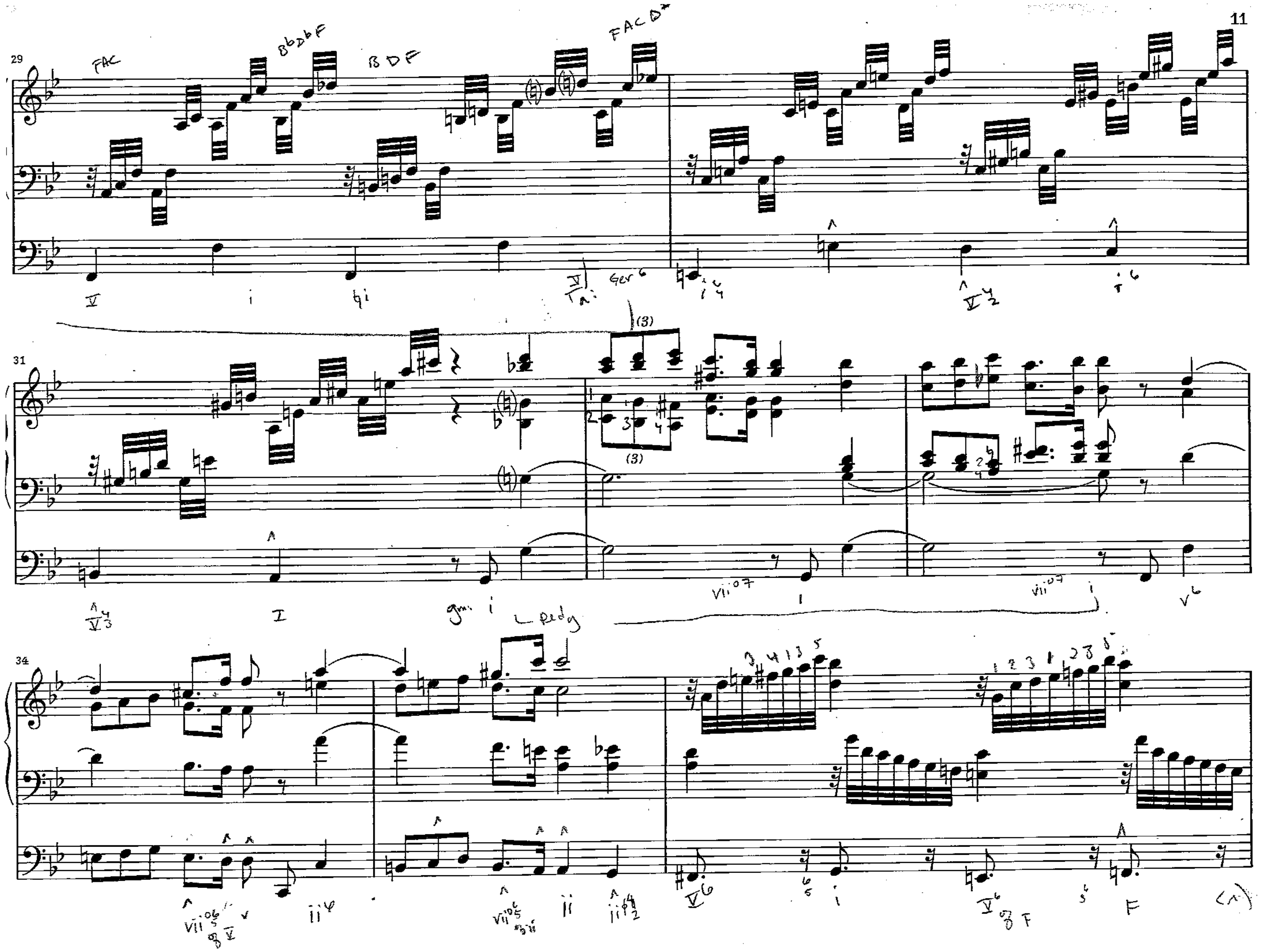
*) Die [illegible] Autograph.

*) The parentheses are present in the autograph.

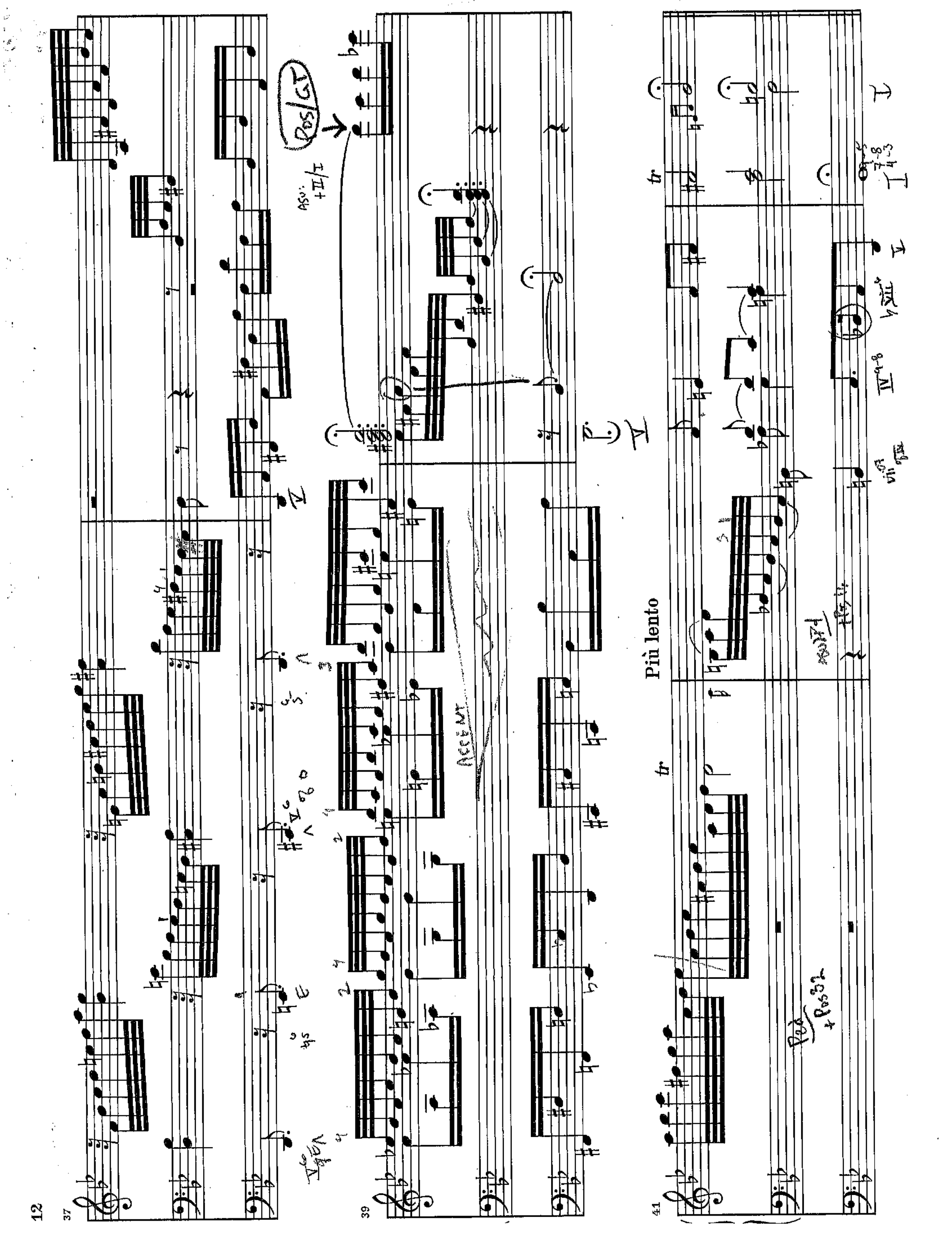
*) Les parenthèses proviennent de l'autographe.


9
9
13
17
19
(3)
(3)
poco rit.
Rec 1/2


10
21
g
E♭6
a
F6
B♭
G6
C
vii°7/V
23
v
F
vii°7
i
25
♮?
3
5
5
IV7
V4/2
i
27
IV4/2
III M7
i
IV
i
V
C E♭ G♭
B♭ D♭ F
A C E♭
B♭ D♭ F
L Ped F



11
29
FAC
BbDbF
BDF
FACD*
V
i
i
Ger6
i 6 4
V 4 2
i 6
31
(3)
(3)
V 4 3
I
gm: i
pedal
vii°7
i
vii°7
i
V6
34
3 4 1 3 5
1 2 3 1 2 3 5
vii°6 5
ii6
vii°6 5
ii
ii6 4 2
V6
i
V6
F
F


12
37
39
41
Più lento
tr
tr
Pos/GT
Accent
Ped
+ Pos 32

APPENDIX D

ANALYSIS OF COPLAND'S *SYMPHONY FOR ORGAN AND ORCHESTRA*, III. FINALE[99]

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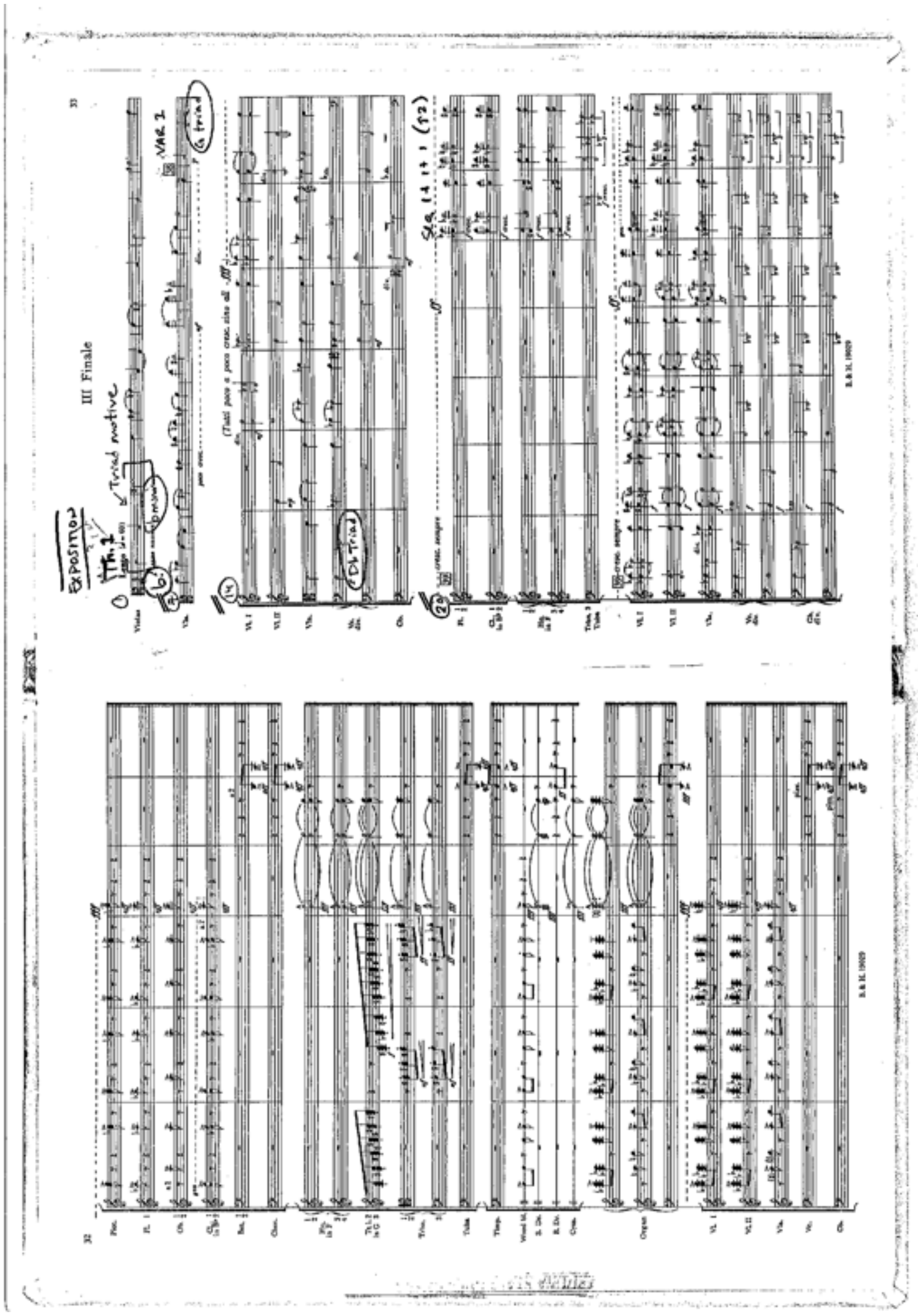
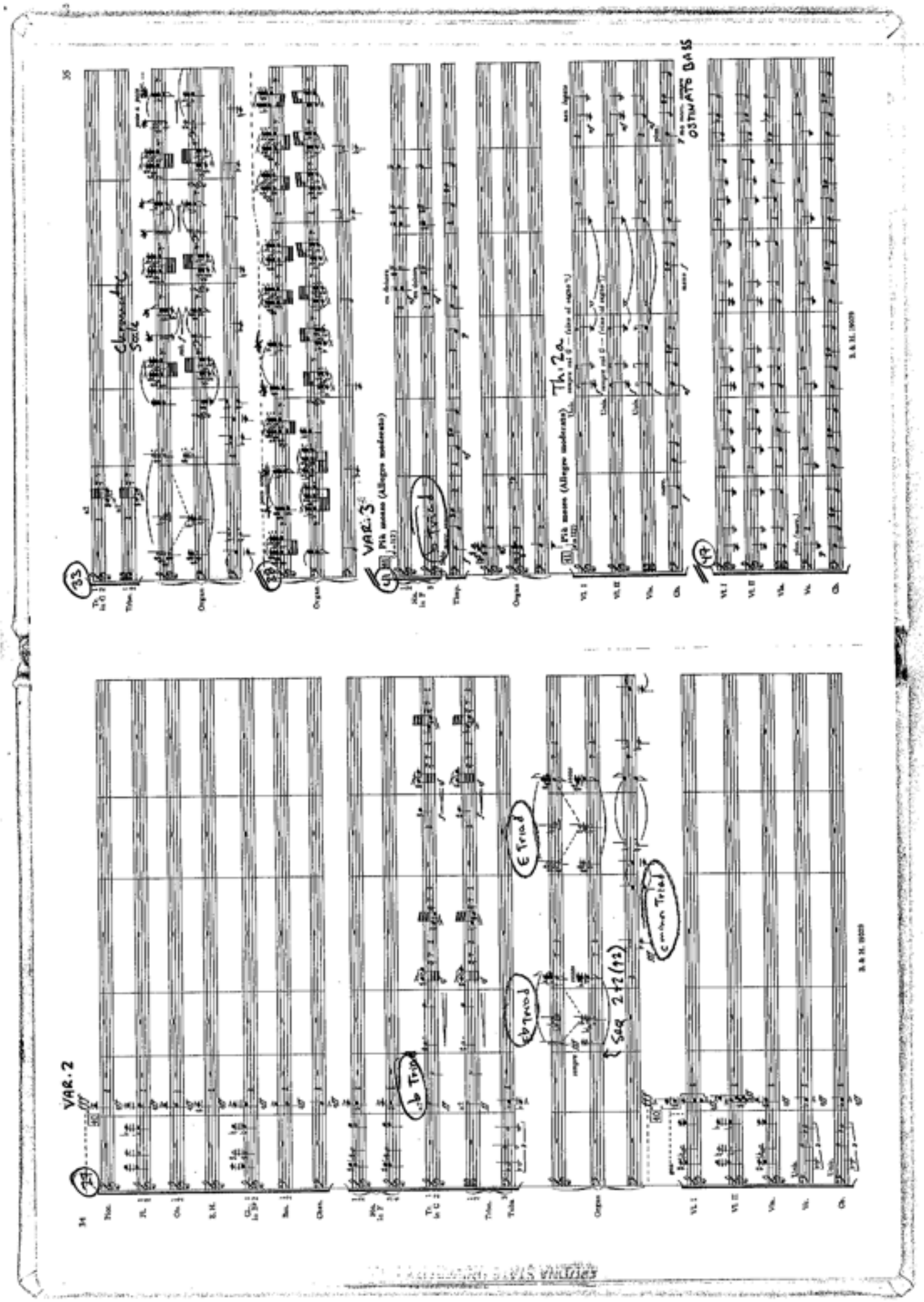
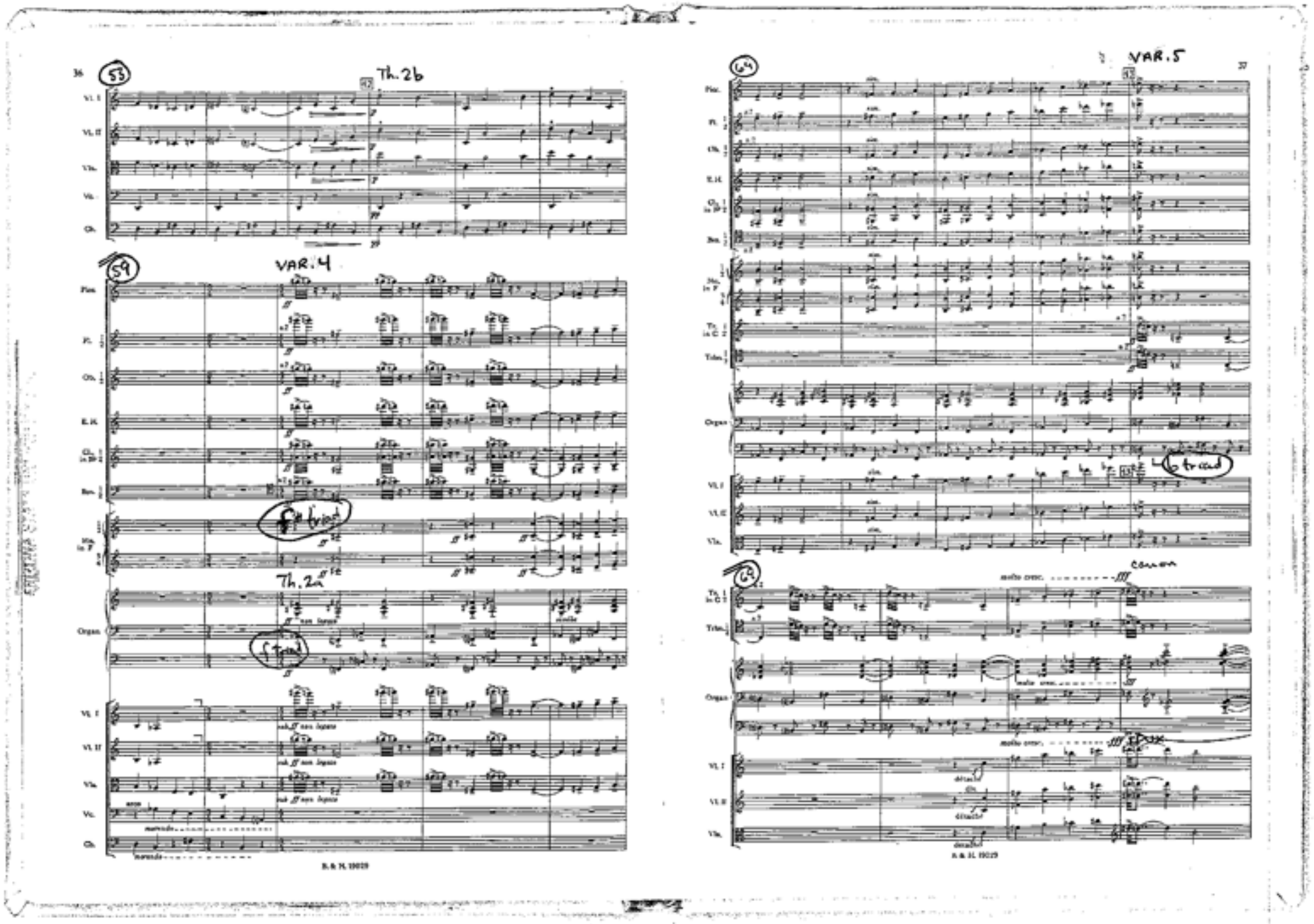
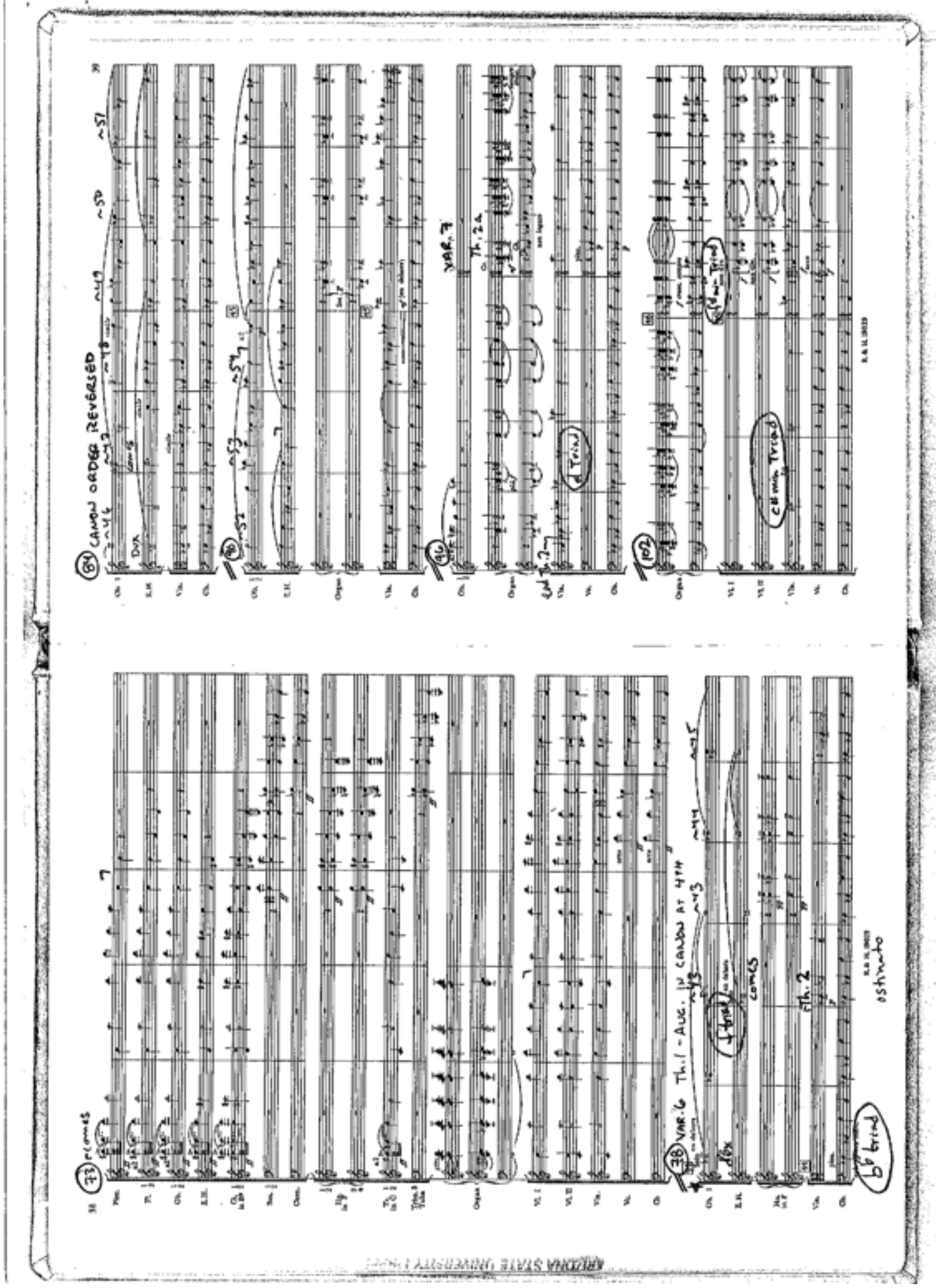
[99] Aaron Copland, "3. Finale" in *Symphony for Organ and Orchestra* (Boosey & Hawkes, 1964).

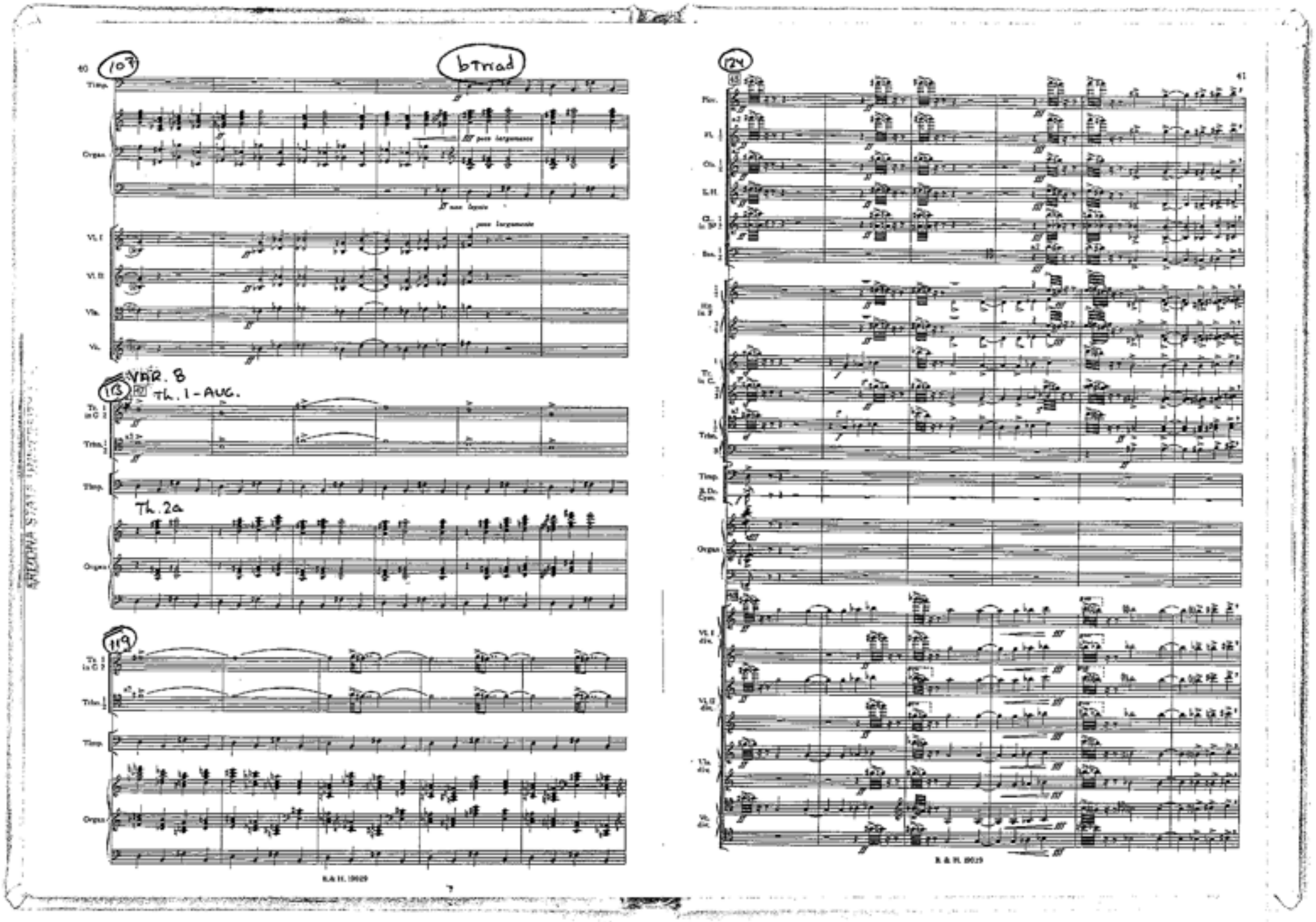

III Finale
EXPOSITION
Th. 1
Triad motive
D minor
VAR 1
G triad
Db Triad
Sta 14 1+1 (52)
B. & H. 19029

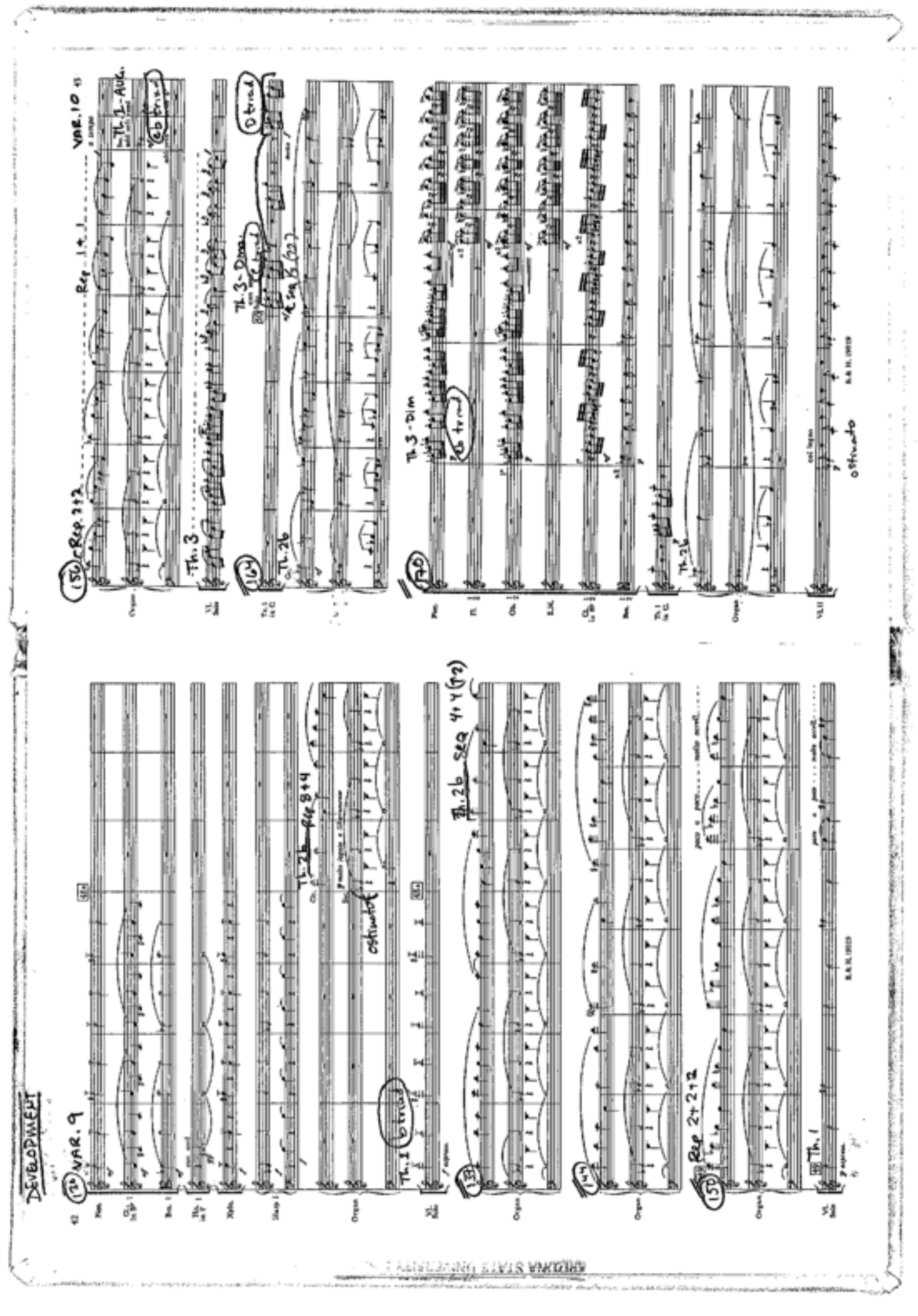

VAR. 2
Chromatic Scale
VAR. 3
Più mosso (Allegro moderato)
Triad
Th. 2a
OSTINATO BASS
Eb Triad
E Triad
Seq 2+2 (12)
C minor Triad

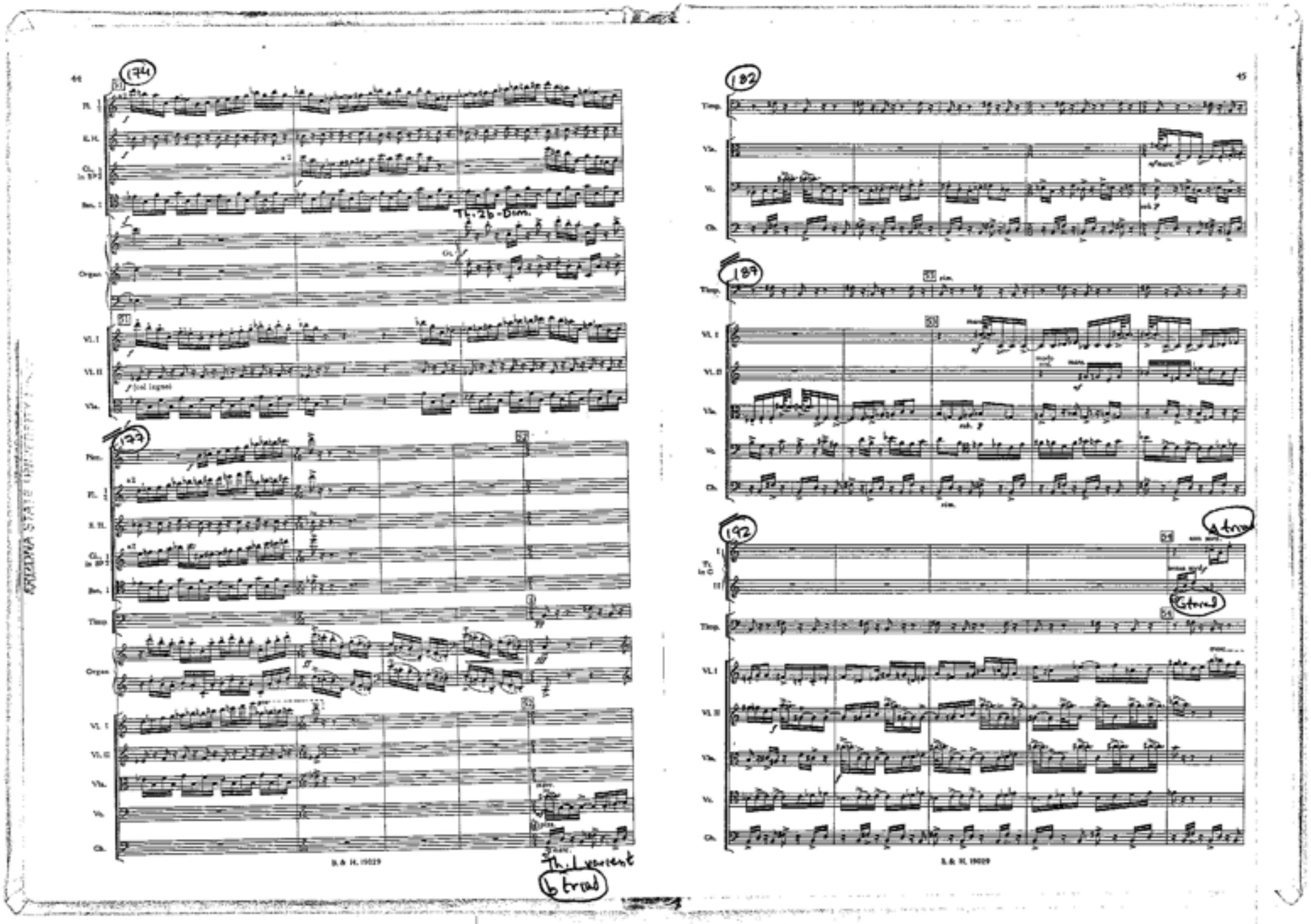

36
58
Th. 2b
59
VAR. 4
Th. 2a
B. & H. 19029
64
VAR. 5
37
65
Canon
B. & H. 19029

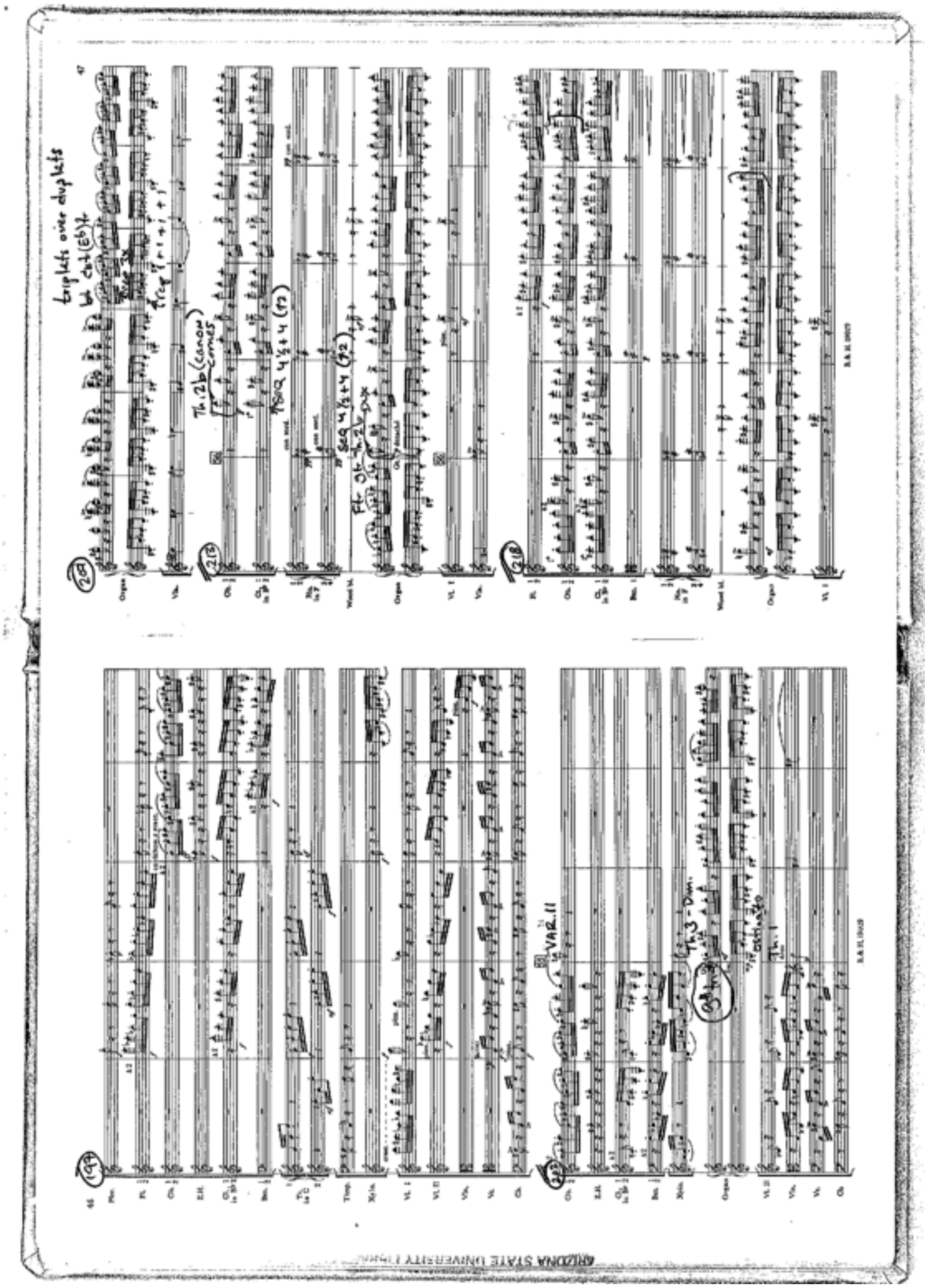


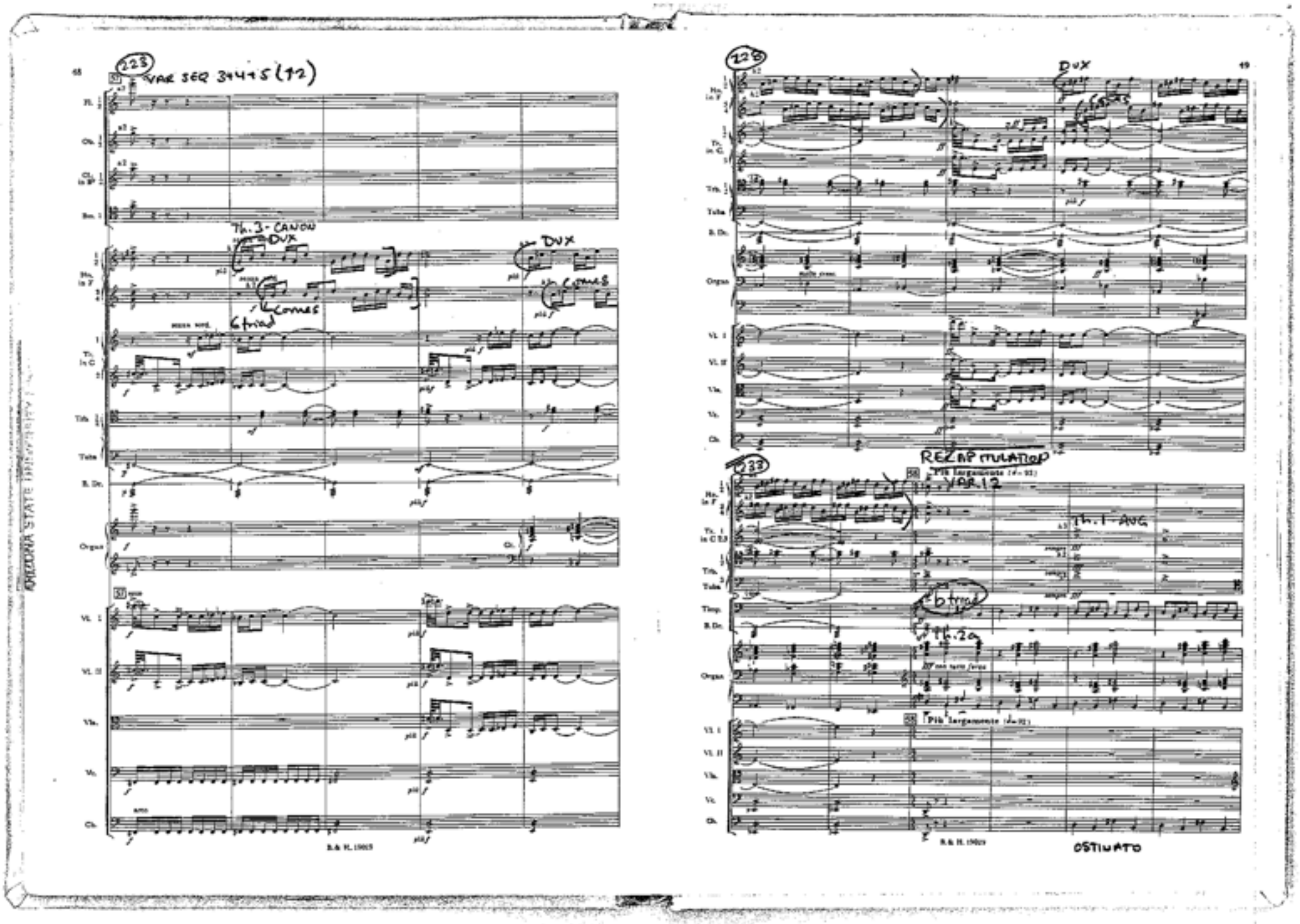
77 comes
78 VAR. 6 Th. 1 - AUG. IN CANON AT 4TH
~43
~44
~45
DUX
COMES
Th. 2
ostinato
B♭ triad
84 CANON ORDER REVERSED
~46
~47
~48
~49
~50
~51
DUX
90
~52
~53
~54
96
VAR. 7
Th. 2a
Th. 2
d triad
102
F♯ min. triad
C♯ min. triad
ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

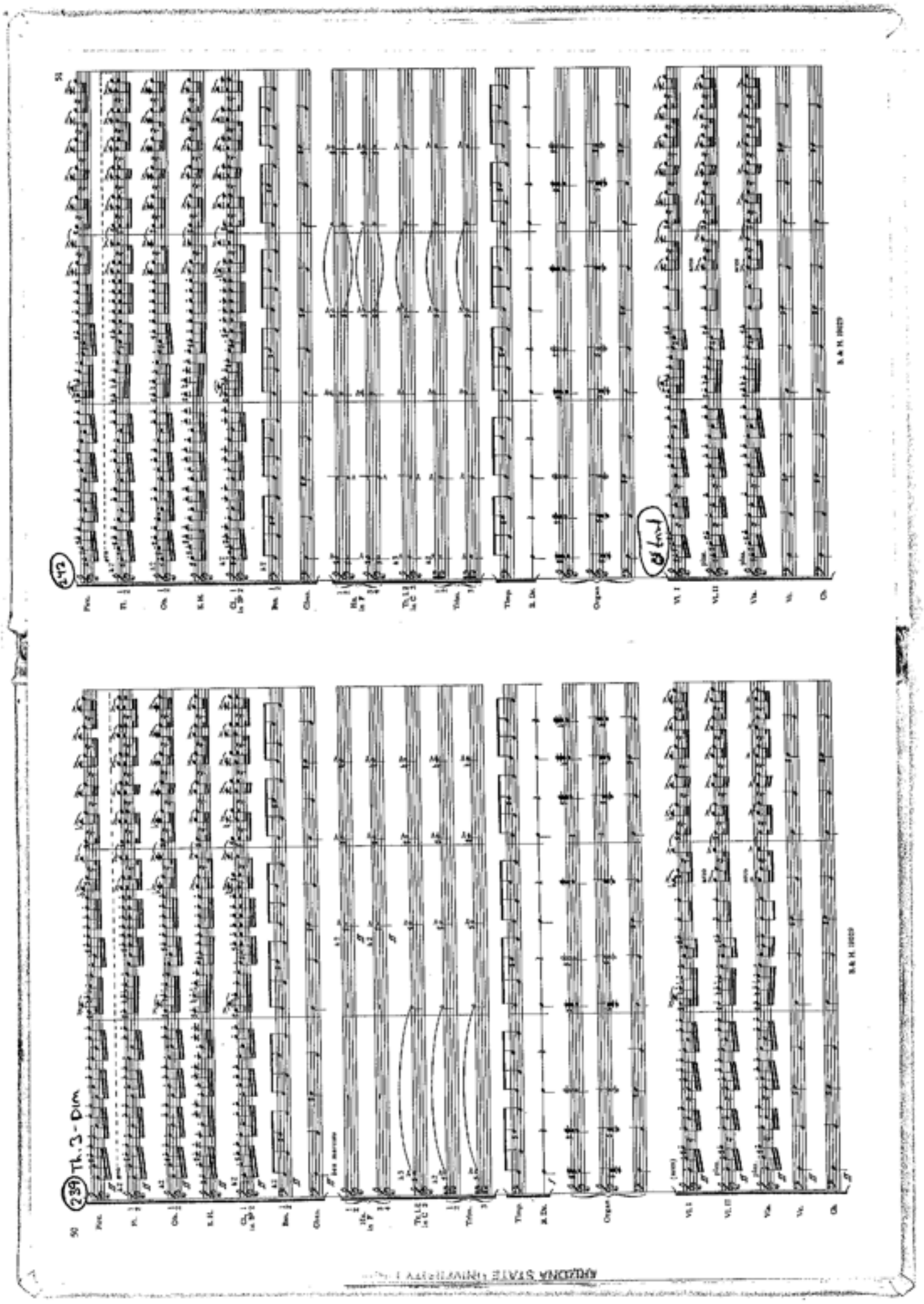

107
b Triad
113
Var. B
Th. 1 - Aug.
Th. 2a
119
124


DEVELOPMENT
VAR. 9
Th. 1
Th. 2b Rep 8+4
ostinato
13
Th. 2b Seq 4+4(+2)
14
15
Rep 2+2+2
Th. 1
15b
Rep 2+2
Rep 1+1
VAR. 10
Th. 2 Aug.
Th. 3
16
Th. 2b
Th. 3 - Dim
D triad
17
Th. 3 - Dim
Th. 2b
ostinato


44
174
Fl.
E.H.
Cl. in B♭
Bn. I
Th. 2b - Dom.
Organ
Vl. I
Vl. II
Vla.
177
Picc.
Timp.
Vc.
Cb.
Th. Lament
b triad
B. & H. 19029
45
182
187
192
Tr. in C
A triad
G triad
B. & H. 19029


triplets over duplets
Th.2b (canon) comes
VAR. II
Th.3 - Dim.
ostinato
Th. 1
ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY


223
VAR SEQ 3+4+5 (12)
Th. 3 - CANON
DUX
Comes
6 triad
DUX
COMES
228
DUX
COMES
233
REZAPITULATION
Più largamente
VAR. 12
Th. 1 - AUG
b triad
Th. 2a
OSTINATO
B.& H. 19015
Fl.
Ob.
Cl. in B♭
Bn.
Hn. in F
Tr. in C
Trb.
Tuba
B. Dr.
Organ
Vl. I
Vl. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.
Timp.



239 Tl. 3 - Dim
242
50
51
Picc.
Fl.
Ob.
E. H.
Cl. in B♭
Bn.
Cbn.
Hn. in F
Tr. in C
Trbn.
Timp.
B. Dr.
Organ
Vl. I
Vl. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.
B. & H. 19029
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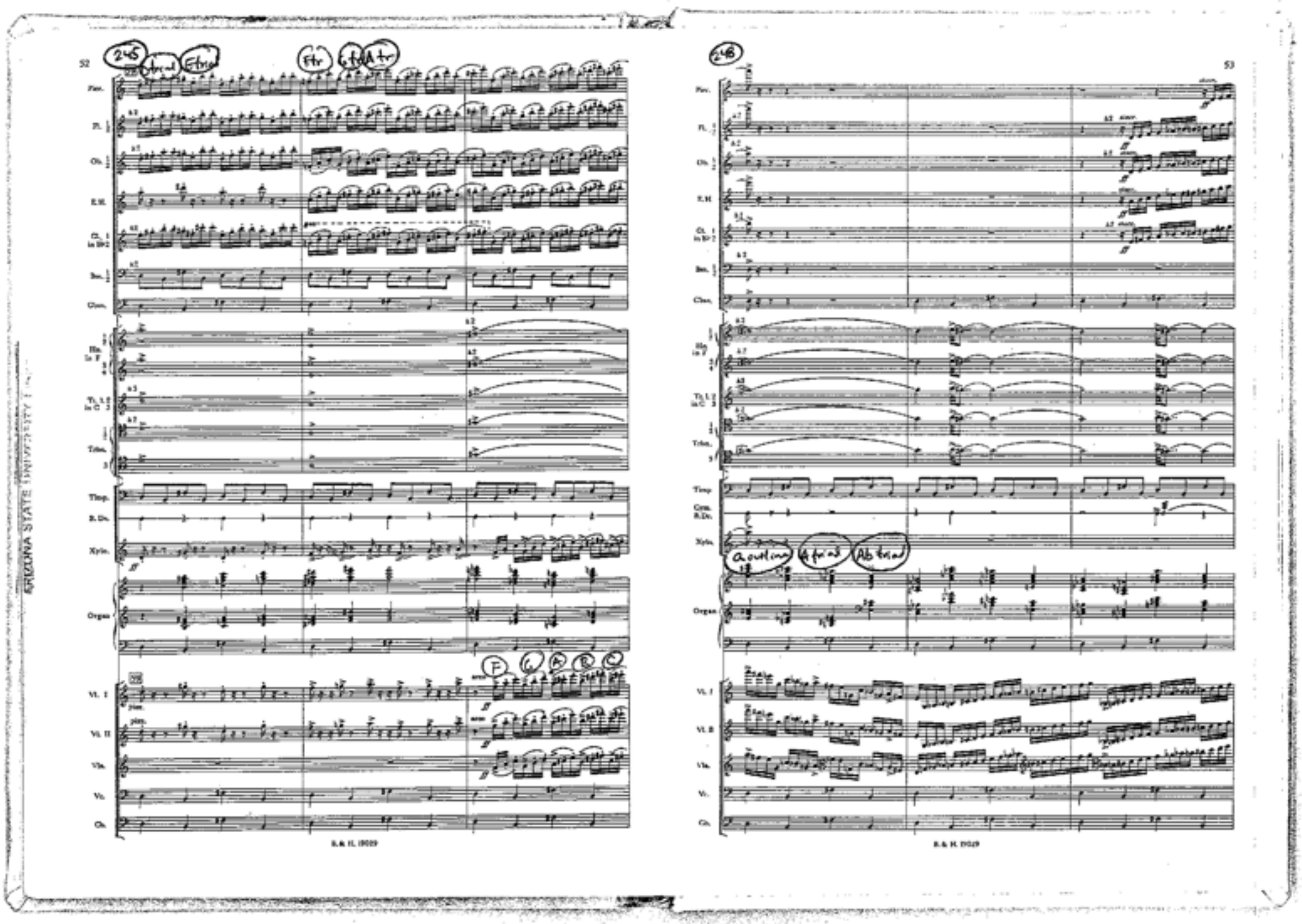
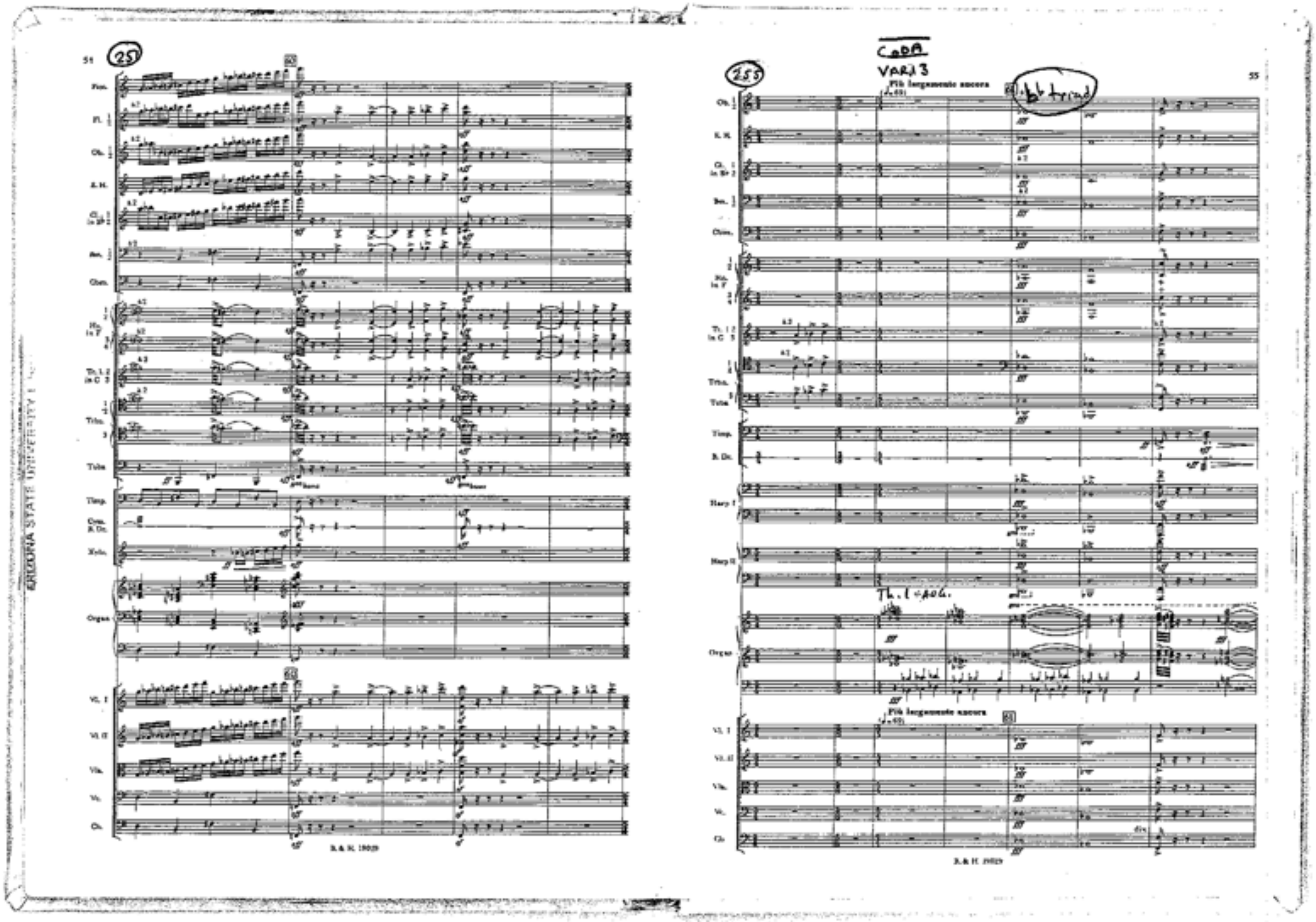
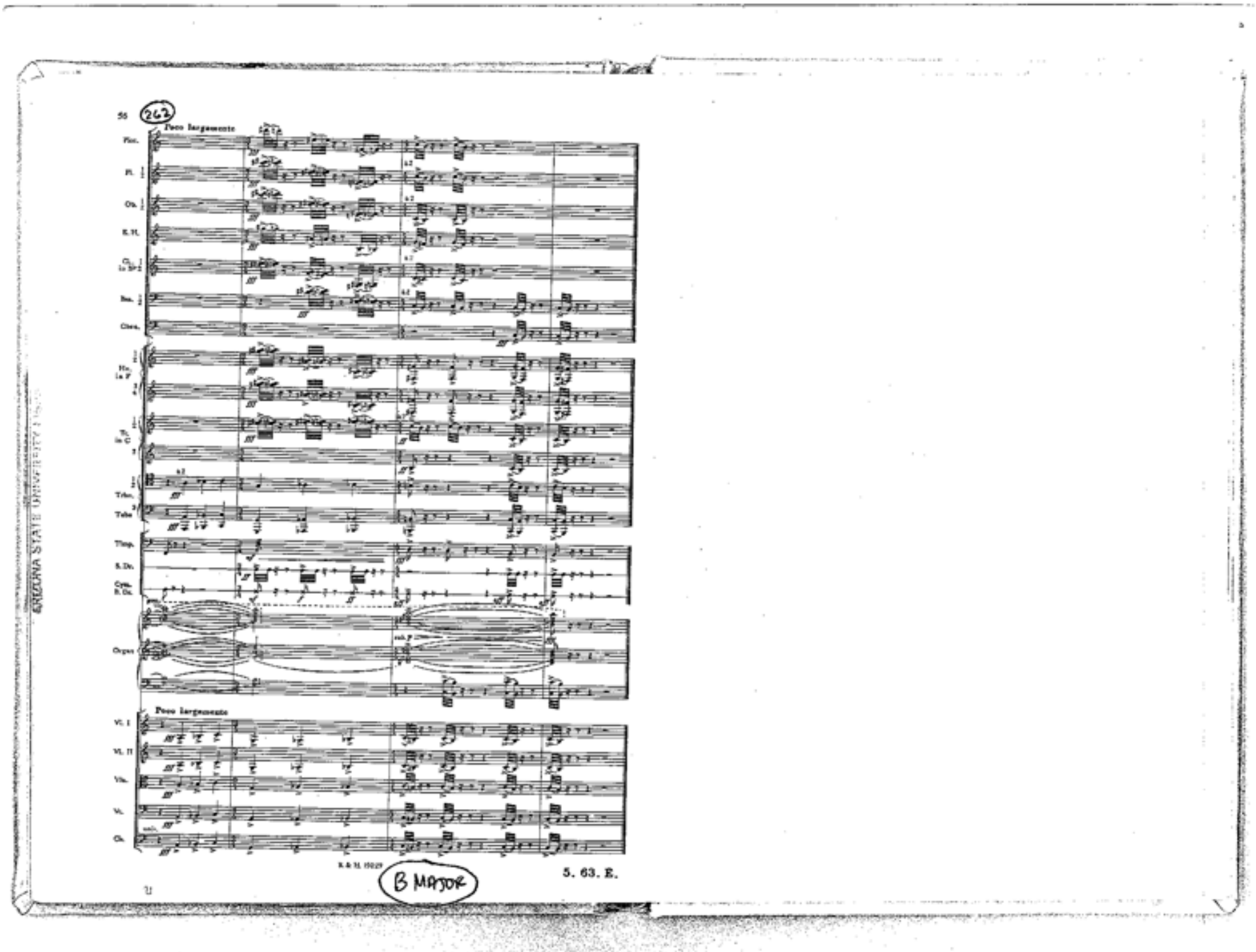

52
245
C triad
E triad
F tr
G tr
A tr
F
G
A
B
C
B & H. 19029
248
53
G outline
A triad
Ab triad
B & H. 19029


CODA
VAR 13
Più largamente ancora
bb triad
B. & H. 19029


55
262
Poco largamente
Picc.
Fl.
Ob.
E.H.
Cl. in B♭
Bs.
Cbsn.
Hr. in F
Tr. in C
Tbn.
Tuba
Timp.
S.Dr.
Cym. B.Dr.
Organ
Poco largamente
Vl. I
Vl. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.
B MAJOR
5. 63. E.