

Johann Sebastian Bach: *Dazu ist erschienen der Sohn Gottes* – BWV 40

While most commentators observe the military aspects present in the cantata's text, a great deal of the commentary overlooks or is unaware of the important element of rhetoric ("musical speech") in the Baroque, especially the use of the horn and its connection to classical Roman motifs. I'm focusing the discussion on that subject for this week, and specifically for the opening chorus for this cantata; I believe that for Bach and his peers, the use of the horn in Christmas cantatas was a rhetorical device to conjure images of Roman triumphal processions: the triumph of Caesar marching into Rome, with Jesus Christ as the new victor, having conquered Satan.

Allegorical symbolism and rhetorical devices



Philip Pickett

Philip Pickett's research into Baroque notions of rhetoric and its background in allegorical drama and court spectacle is vitally important, and I'll do my best to give a summary of his theory, with extensive quotes from his notes to the Brandenburg Concertos. During the Baroque, composers saw music as a form of speech, and compositions were seen as musical conversations. Using classical authors such as Quintilian and Cicero, the five elements of rhetoric were applied to music: *inventio* and *dispositio* were applied to musical composition: *elocutio*, *memoria* and *actio* were applied to musical performances. Using his poetic text as a launch point (the *loci topic*), a composer would use nuggets of musical inspiration which could be expanded into a complete movement or even composition of several movements. This composition could then be understood as a sophisticated speech. The relationship between words and music became vitally important during the Renaissance, with an entire lexicon of musical expressions and phrases to represent spoken texts, even specific note patterns were identified similar to scanning lines of poetry. The challenge for modern listeners is to relearn this musical lexicon, if we want to be fully informed. Antonio Vivaldi's "Four Seasons" provides a wonderful illustration of this, in the musical score, above specific points, the text of a sonnet is placed above the notes, giving the listener specific cues and clues about the rhetorical phrasing.

Pickett states further "the development of a vocabulary of musical figures which enhanced the direct communication of the text. Later, these ideas were applied to instrumental music of all kinds. The musical figures associated with certain words had become so well-known that performers of sonatas and concertos were expected to recognize them and to project the emotions or Affekts implied by them in the same way as singers of cantatas or opera arias. A deeper knowledge and understanding of 17th- and 18th-century attitudes to rhetoric, Affekt and symbolism in musical composition might lead to a rather different assessment of many Baroque works and their performance. In Germany especially this musical rhetoric became so important that it was studied, classified and described in numerous treatises, and its axioms applied to the composition and performance of works as diverse as opera arias, cantatas, instrumental sonatas and concertos. Rhetoric, the art of persuasion, was designed to appeal to the emotions as well as the intellect, and was employed by the musical theorists as justification for the emotional effects of music. Besides the surviving textbooks on musical rhetoric there is plenty of evidence in Mass-settings, cantatas, odes and operas that German composers were often obsessed with the concept of using stock musical figures to enhance the meaning of words. And they frequently went further, not only representing in music a variety of spiritual and emotional states, but also finding ways of portraying crowds, battles, waves, breezes, birds, storms, and a host of allegorical figures."

Renaissance and Baroque Court Spectacle



*Pageant Wagon of Water with Neptune Enthroned
Official reception in Metz for the Duchesse de la Valette*

Pickett examines the nature of Renaissance and Baroque court festivals: “The most important element was the processional entry, first a manifestation of medieval feudalism and later an emulation of the Imperial Roman triumph. The Renaissance developed the procession into an allegorical spectacle where the ruler was presented as an Ancient hero, and the focal point of the procession was the various pageant-wagons, decorated with Classical allusions and containing actors, singers and musicians personifying allegorical and mythological figures. A wagon decorated as Mount Parnassus, with musicians representing the nine Muses, was a particularly popular tableau in 17th-century German processions.

The medieval tournament was turned into a highly organized and stylized pageant of mock combat - again usually reflecting mythological themes. The horse-ballet mirrored the movement of the heavens and symbolized cosmic harmony (and the hoped-for peace and good fortune to be brought by the ruler). Examples from 17th- and 18th-century German court spectacles include:

Festivities for the Baptism of Maximilian Emanuel von Wittelsbach Munich 1662

The theme of the festival linked the Wittelsbach family to Theseus and included a performance of the opera *Fedra incoronata* by Kerll. “The entrance and exit procession took place with magnificent music along with the sounds of trumpets and timpani, also tall triumph wagons... After a musical combat yet another procession came... consisting of court musicians.” The various tableaux included Medea, Amazons, Theseus, Hippolytus, Eurypylus (son of Neptune), Perseus, Hercules, Atlas, Castor and Pollux, Pandora, the King of Thessaly and the Argonaut's ship - and a number of different instrumental ensembles were involved.

Festivities for the State Visit of the Brothers of the Duke of Saxony/Dresden 1678

Apart from the usual Masses, races and games of skill there was a long allegorical procession on the theme of the influence of the seven planets on Man's fate, with pageant wagons for the Muses, Diana and Mars. Later in the procession came singers accompanied by cornets and curtals, and last of all a group of musical “peasants” playing shawm, bagpipe and fiddle. The climax of the festivities was a performance of a seven-act opera-ballet on the influence of the seven planets, with music by Bernhard.

Carnival Festivities at the Ducal Court/Dresden 1695

This was by all accounts the most elaborate and impressive event of its kind ever staged in Dresden. The main entertainment was a procession of pagan gods and goddesses. Music formed an integral part of each tableau, and the instruments employed were determined by the character of their deity. The pageant included the Seven Deadly Sins (bagpipes), Mars and Bellona (trumpets, shawms and timpani), Neptune with nymphs and satyrs (oboes and bassoons), Bacchus with bacchantes (oboes, bagpipes, fiddles, lute, guitar, harp and triangle), Ceres (oboes and bassoons), Apollo (lute) and many, many more.

There were similar well-documented festivities in Dresden in 1697, 1709 (again with Parnassus and the Muses) and 1719. The marriage of Prince Friedrich August II of Saxony and Maria Josepha of Austria was one of the major political and social events at the Dresden Court. A cycle of elaborate festivities took place between the winter of 1718 and September 1719, and the theme was again the influence of the seven planets and their associated deities on the fate of Man. One afternoon there was a performance of Heinichen's "*La Gara degli Dei*" ("The Contest of the Gods") sung by Mercury, Apollo, Diana, Mars, Venus, Jupiter and Saturn. The work was introduced by a prelude which featured a sonata for two horns, solo violin, oboe and strings, and ended with a coda for strings and horns. Not Brandenburg no 1, unfortunately, but this kind of performance does offer a context for speculation concerning the likely origin of the work and the character of the Brandenburg set as a whole."

Brandenburg Concerto no 1: Caesar's Triumph



Detail of Trajan's column in Rome:
Cornu players in a triumphal procession

For most listeners, hunting horns typically conjure notions of the hunt and most commentators focus on this, but Pickett doesn't: "I believe that the larger signaling horn was developed and introduced into the hunt in the first place because of old associations with the Roman triumphal entry - the hunt being regarded as a kind of triumphal progress. Ancient brass instruments (the curved *cornu* and *buccina* and the straight tuba) were well known from bas-reliefs of Roman military processions and triumphs. In Renaissance and Baroque art Fame's trumpet was always depicted as long

and straight, so "fantastic stage-versions of the *cornu* or *buccina* often led the triumphal entries and processions which formed such an important part of 16th- and 17th-century court spectacle and celebration. Roman reliefs and Renaissance paintings of the *cornu* in particular (often confused with the *buccina* in literary sources) show instruments which must have looked to Bach and his contemporaries remarkably similar to the large, hoop-like Baroque hunting horns with which they were familiar, so it is not surprising that horns were used to represent triumphal entries and worldly pomp and glory.

Bach himself symbolizes God's entry into the world as Jesus Christ in the Quoniam of the B-minor Mass with a horn obbligato. Bach uses the same fanfare again, this time played by a trumpet, in the aria "*Grosser Herr und starker Koenig*" from Part I of the "*Oratorium tempore Nativitatis Christi*"; and though the trumpet symbolizes royalty the use of this particular fanfare figure probably represents God's entry into the world. Written low in the trumpet's range, it suggests the horn register in which the call would more normally have been heard. So the first movement of Brandenburg I probably portray a triumphal entry with two "modern" representations of the Roman cornu blaring out fanfares at the head of the procession.

BWV 40: Christ's Birth as Triumph



Madonna and Child
By Benozzo Gozzoli, Siena 1450

December 1723, was Bach's first Christmas in Leipzig, so much of the instrumental pieces he composed in Köthen, would have been fresh in his mind. Using the cantata text as his launch point for the opening chorus ("For this is appeared the Son of God, that he destroy all the works of the devil.") I firmly believe the rhetorical device for this piece was a transformation of Caesar's triumph in Brandenburg Concerto no 1 to Christ's triumph in BWV 40's opening chorus (please listen to the mp3s detailed below as well as the Sibelius files). Both pieces share many similar qualities: they're both in the same key, and share similar motifs: such as processional marching bass line and blaring horn blasts. This notion is borne out by the subsequent stanzas in the cantata text, which stressed the victory of Jesus over Satan, e.g. the fantastic bass aria "Höllische Schlange"

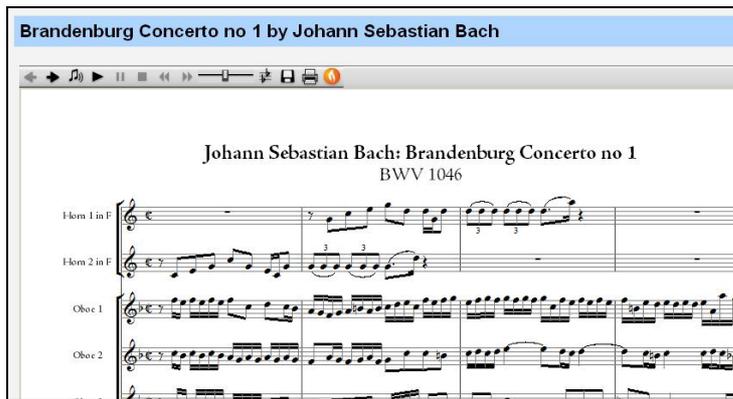
*Hell's very serpent,
Art thou not anxious?
He who thy head as a victor shall dash
Is to us born now,
And all the fallen
Shall in eternal repose be made glad.*

And then later in the 1st chorale:

*Shake thy head now and declare:
Flee, thou ancient serpent!
Why renewest thou thy sting
For my fear and anguish?
Now indeed thy head is dashed,
And I've through the passion
Of my Savior fled from thee
To the hall of gladness.*

Bach was not alone in using horns for such rhetorical purposes in German Baroque cantata literature. Bach's predecessor, Johann Kuhnau wrote a cantata requiring 2 horns for the Feast of the Annunciation (related to the birth of Christ) "Wie schön leuchtet der Morgenstern." Other composers such as Georg Philipp Telemann, Christoph Graupner, and Johann Fasch would include horns in their compositions for Christmas in a manner very similar to Bach. It's apparent there was common tradition and framework that was the basis for these pieces, and not some random compositional coincidence, as you will hear by listening to the Sibelius files and mp3s.

Multimedia Files: Sibelius and MP3s



Screenshot of Scorch file of Brandenburg Concerto no 1

In an effort to make the cantata discussion more interactive, Aryeh has placed several files on the Bach cantata website. These files will illustrate some of the points mentioned in Pickett's theories, as well illustrate context by providing some snippets of music from Bach's peers, Telemann, Fasch, and Graupner. The Telemann Serenata is an interesting case in point because it uses the birth in 1716 of Prince Leopold to the Holy Roman

Emperor as bringing peace to Germany, themes are very similar to Bach's in BWV 40. To hear these files, you must have the Sibelius "Scorch" browser plug-in installed, which is available for several platforms and browsers. Follow the instructions provide on the website, and if you have a successful installation, you should see and hear a sample file provided on the Scorch page. Also make sure you have your computer speakers on, or your earphones plugged in.

Scorch Browser plug-in:

<http://www.Sibelius.com/Scorch>

Brandenburg Concerto no 1 in F major, BWV 1046:

http://bach-cantatas.com/Scores/BWV40-Kim/sibelius/bwv_1046/Brandenburg-no1.htm

Dazu ist erschienen der Sohn Gottes, BWV 40:

http://bach-cantatas.com/Scores/BWV40-Kim/sibelius/bwv_40/BWV40.htm

Unser Wandel by Johann Fasch (for Christmas 1736): (by kind permission of Brian Clark)

http://bach-cantatas.com/Scores/BWV40-Kim/sibelius/fasch/Fasch_Unser_Wandel_sample.htm

Jauzchet ihr Himmel by Christoph Graupner (for Christmas 1743):

<http://bach-cantatas.com/Scores/BWV40-Kim/sibelius/graupner/451-58-07.htm>

MP3 files:

[John Eliot Gardner's performance of the opening chorus to BWV 40](#)

A most beautiful performance of the opening chorus.

[Comparison MP3](#)

This file provides brief clips of Brandenburg Concerto no 1's opening to BWV 40 and then finally Christoph Graupner's Symphony for 2 Violins, 2 Horns, 4 Timpani, GWV 644. This is to provide audio clues to support the thesis of similar rhetorical devices common to German Baroque composers.

[Telemann MP3](#)

An aria from Telemann's 1716 Serenata for the Birth of Prince Leopold to the Holy Roman Emperor "Teutschland grunt und bluht in Friede!" The theme is a long awaited birth bringing peace to the Empire.