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Contrasting Elements of Performance Practice in the English, French, German, and Italian Styles of the 17th and Early 19th Centuries

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THE FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY
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CONTRASTING ELEMENTS OF
PERFORMANCE PRACTICE IN THE
ENGLISH, FRENCH, GERMAN, AND
ITALIAN STYLES OF THE 17TH
AND EARLY 18TH CENTURIES

By

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Pièce d'Orgue, BWV 572

J.S. Bach (1685-1750)

J.S. Bach's *Pièce d'Orgue* is unique in several ways, the most apparent being the title; it is the only organ piece of Bach to have a title in French. The work is made up of three sections, all codependent on each other. The first section, with the heading "Tres Vitement" (very quickly), uses an arpeggiating expansion of tonic (I-IV-I-ii⁷) as a springboard into a buoyant toccata, which travels along through several interesting harmonic events, such as a brief tonicization of the predominant chord in measures 16-17, without there ever being a strong cadential moment. As a result, this first section acts as an introduction and a large tonic expansion of *G*. The first section ends on the leading tone, *F-sharp*, and a low *G* in the pedal announces the second section. This section, with the heading "Gravement" - or "Gayement" (see below) -, contrasts five voices to the first section's one. Immediately, one can hear that the character of the piece has changed, as the pedal line creeps from *G* to *D* and then finally to *E*, creating the piece's first true cadence, V-vi, a deceptive cadence. The piece continues in a persistent manner, with all five voices engaged, almost without rest, for the remainder of the second section. Additionally, in the second section's final gesture, a sixth voice is added. A low *D* in the pedal sustains for eight and a half measures before the section ends on a diminished-seven chord (vii^o7). The third section begins on the same diminished-seven chord but in a modified, strung out figure, with arpeggiation and passing tones in a quick sextuplet. This rhythmic figure repeats 116 times, varying the harmonic material throughout. At the same time, the pedal part moves down by half step, from *C-sharp* to *D*. The piece comes to a close with a dominant pedal tone beneath a rapid ascending scalar figure, which greatly resembles that of the final two measures of the first

section; a dominant-seven chord leads to a tonic chord, making the strongest perfect authentic cadence in the whole piece and bringing it to a striking close.

In addition to being formally interesting, *Piece d'Orgue* is a work of varied interpretations, both by performers and editors. While certain performance practices have become commonplace for this piece, as well as Bach's organ music in general, there is an alternate approach which merits sincere study. An edition of the score for BWV 572, edited by Kenneth Gilbert, is based on what is believed to be the earliest version of the piece (Walther). Unfortunately, there is no autograph manuscript, so all of the editions available today are based on various copies.¹ Analyzing the differences between the Gilbert edition, based on the Walther copy, and the Kalmus edition, based on the Hauser copy², provides an opportunity to hear one composition performed twice, achieving vastly different musical results. The Hauser edition employs the standard beaming and layout associated with this work in modern editions. Bach's *Piece d'Orgue* can be played in the way that has become standard for the majority of his organ music, but it also can be convincingly interpreted in a French Classical style. The two editions of *Piece d'Orgue* being performed differ in three primary areas: beaming/grouping of notes in the first section, harmony throughout entire piece, and the title of the second section. The way the notes are grouped in the first section dictates which hand will play which notes. The articulation depends largely on how these notes are divided up between the hands, so these beaming decisions impact the piece's interpretation. For a variety of reasons, from differing "original copies" to conflicting readings of the composer's handwriting, the editors have conveyed different harmonic and melodic decisions at several places throughout the piece. For example, in the opening section, "Tres Vivement", the Gilbert edition includes a whole passage, repeating the

¹ Williams, 166

² Kalmus, Pg. 2 of Preface

opening figure an octave lower, which the more recent editions leave out, moving straight into the tonicization of the predominant key.¹ The heading of the second section is "Gayement" in the Walther-based edition and "Gravement" in the Hauser-based edition. The descriptive word observed will affect tempo and articulation. As Williams points out, "Gayement" could suggest a "lively allabreve piece".² The presence of "...suspended harmonies and a bass-line rather like a purposeful cantus firmus..." contributes to this second section bearing some resemblance to a French *Plein Jeu*. Given the French-like elements of the piece, from section titles to compositional style, it is plausible that the second section could be performed in the same manner as a *Plein Jeu* from a French Classical organ suite. In terms of performance practice, this would mean taking a freer approach to the rhythms printed on the page, allowing for the occasional dotted or swung eighth note pair. This drives the piece onward with renewed vigor each time a rhythmic alteration is made. Adopting the French Classical style would also require the registration to be revisited. The *Plein Jeu* uses the principal choruses on both manuals; the most notable difference here would be the presence of the 16' Bourdon on the Great. (The first section would be played on the secondary manual, and the rest of the piece would be on the primary manual and pedal.) When a pedal line is present, it is typical to use an 8' Trompet, along with the Principals. For a more traditional interpretation of the piece, the first section, still on the secondary manual, would be registered with a lighter combination than a principal chorus: perhaps 8', 4', and 2' Flutes. The second and third sections would still make use of the Great and Pedals, but without the 16' Bourdon on the Great and with a 16' Posaune in the Pedal instead of the 8' Trompet.

All registrations refer to the recording of the recital at First Presbyterian.

¹ Gilbert, M. 14-17

² Williams, 166

Registration: (Walther)

Ch: Gedackt 8', Principal 4', Octave 2'

Gt: Bourdon 16', Præstant 8', Octave 4', Mixture IV-V

Ped: Subbass 16', Octave 8', Octave 4', Trompet 8'

Registration: (Hauser)

Ch: Gedackt 8', Principal 4'

Gt: Præstant 8', Octave 4', Mixture IV-V

Ped: Subbass 16', Octave 8', Octave 4', Posaune 16'

Toccata Prima (Libro Primo)**Girolamo Frescobaldi (1583-1643)**

One of the reasons that Frescobaldi's organ music is considered as some of the most significant of the 17th-18th century era¹ is that the composer left some very detailed instructions on how his music was to be played. With careful study, an organist may now perform a work of Frescobaldi with the composer's exact wishes present in his or her mind. The first of these instructions is to play without remaining "subject to a beat...".² A composer making a point for the player to deal freely with their music demonstrates a profound respect for the role of the individual interpretation and the common musical sense of the performer. In *Toccata Prima*, the sections which make up the piece each have a different character and so inspire subtly different tempi. Some of the other instructions include asking the player to pause slightly before having sixteenths in both hands at once or to always sustain cadences and slow down just before reaching them.³ The composer's most obvious intention, inferred by reading his instructions in

¹ Stemberge, 148

² Lester, 11

³ Lester, 12

detail, is for the performer to feel as intentionally involved in the music creation process as possible.

The registration chosen for this performance of *Toccata Prima* is based on the guidance from an Italian organ builder, Costanzo Antegnati. The piece will begin with the 8' Præstant and a 4' Spielflöte on the Great; this registration remains the same throughout the entire piece.¹

Registration:

Gt: Præstant 8', Spielflöte 4'

Voluntary in G

Henry Purcell (1659-1695)

During the late 17th and early 18th centuries, English organ music relied heavily on the fusing of neighboring stylistic schools.² An area where this may be seen is in the ornamentation used by Henry Purcell in his *Voluntary in G*. One of the aspects of Purcell's organ compositions which make them an indispensable part of the repertoire is his careful use of ornaments and the great lengths to which he went to clarify how these ornaments should be played. The table in Appendix B demonstrates Purcell's ornaments in detail. According to Cox, the ornaments used by English organ composers during this time were "based on French practice".³ An example of this French influence is the English trill (or "Shake"). Like trills from the French Classical style, the ornament begins on the upper note.⁴

The *Voluntary in G* also reveals information about Purcell's compositional style. His tendency to use chromaticism for expressive purposes in his compositions is evident throughout the first movement. For example, in measures 11 and 12, an *F-natural* moves to an *F-sharp*, only

¹ Stemberge, 154

² Cox, 199

³ *ibid*, 200

⁴ Marshall, 122

to move back to an *F-natural* two measures later. This subtle shift expands the tonal pallet, essentially forcing the ear to hear two modes, almost at the same time. In measures 14-17, the *F-natural* appears to signify a tonicization of the subdominant harmony, C Major. However, instead of the authentic cadence implied by the motion in measures 16-17, the resolution in measure 18 returns the *F-sharp*, abruptly bringing back the implication of G Major. This use of chromaticism may also be observed in his choral works, such as *Hear My Prayer*. Smith points out an Italian influence on the style of Purcell's voluntaries. *Voluntary in G* "...begins in a manner reminiscent of the chordal opening to a Frescobaldi toccata, and is followed by a lively canzona-like section."¹

Registration:

Gt: Præstant 8'

Voluntary in G

John Stanley (1712-1786)

John Stanley's *Voluntary in G* (No. 3 from Op. 5) is a fine example of the composer's meticulous and witty writing. Stanley's most significant contributions to the organ repertoire are his concertos and voluntaries. Many of his voluntaries were in two parts; however, several consisted of more movements.² Three categories of voluntaries, prevalent during Stanley's time, and which make up the majority of his voluntaries are the Cornet, Trumpet, and Fugue Voluntaries.³ The two-part organ voluntary had become a staple of the English style, but Stanley's voluntaries brought a fresh approach to the form, implementing the Italian idea of *ritornello*.⁴ This can be heard in *Voluntary in G*, the second movement, by noticing the

¹ Smith, 135

² Lynan, 147

³ Cox, 199-200; Lynan, 147

⁴ Cooper, 103

exposition of the opening theme (measures 1 and 2) with its restatement at the end of the piece (measures 81 and 82).

While his voluntary does not make use of the same sort of chromaticism that has been observed in Purcell's *Voluntary in G* (see above), Stanley finds his own way to maintain interest throughout the piece. The first movement, to be played on the 8' Præstant, is filled with suspensions and retardations, which produce a great deal of harmonic tension. The general counterpoint makes use of many parallel thirds and sixths, creating a warm, duet sense between the upper voices. The second movement springs to life in a sharp contrast with the slow opening movement, largely by the nature of its Cornet registration (8', 4', and 2' flutes; plus, the 2^{2/3} and 1^{3/5} stops). The music is quicker, and the writing is more rapid and ornate. A two-voice texture is used for most of the movement; however, before significant cadential points, such as measures 29, 43, and 89, Stanley adds a third voice. This is done subtly but in a way that makes these moments musically satisfying.

Registration:

I. Gt: Præstant 8'

II. Gt: Rohrflöte 8', Spielflöte 4', Gemshorn 2', Quint 1^{3/5}

Suite Deuxieme

Louis-Nicolas Clérambault (1676-1749)

The French Classical style had the benefit of being an extremely well-developed school of composition and performance practice, with a long list of composers contributing an abundance of music to the repertoire.¹ Clérambault's second suite, *Suite Deuxieme*, is an excellent showcase of the typical compositional practices of this style. The piece is in seven

¹ Higginbottom, 176

movements and makes use of a variety of timbres through specific registration specifications. The outer movements, *Plein Jeu* and *Caprice sur les Grands Jeux* have typical registrations for the period, the first making use of the organ's principal chorus(es) and the last showing off the Reed and Mutation stops in combination.¹ The second and third movements, *Duo* and *Trio*, are similar to each other in that they are meant to have a contrasting registration in each hand, which will ideally allow both (or all three) voices to speak with equal prominence.² (In *The Language of the Classical French Organ*, Douglas provides a comprehensive collection of stop combination instructions which were used to register pieces, such as the movements from Clérambault's suite. It can be seen in this that the *Duo* and *Trio* movements could be registered in a multitude of ways, depending on which set of instructions were being used.³) The fourth movement, *Basse de Cromorne*, is a solo piece for the Cromorne stop, with 8' and 4' flutes used as accompaniment on a secondary manual.⁴ The fifth movement is titled *Flutes* and makes use of the organ's Flute stops and (often times) the Tremulant, creating a warm texture that allows for it to be played in a slow, gentle way.⁵ The sixth movement, *Récit de Nazard*, is another solo movement, meant to imitate the human voice. The Nazard is 2^{2/3}' in pitch and is typically used with 8' and 4' Flutes. This combination is accompanied by at least an 8' Bourdon stop on a secondary manual and possibly more, depending on balance.⁶ The "Récit" category of movement should be played "...tenderly and neatly..."⁷

¹ *ibid*, 181-183

² Douglas, 205, 207

³ *ibid*, 176-215

⁴ *ibid*, 209

⁵ *ibid*, 196

⁶ Douglas, 111-112

⁷ *ibid*, 196

Another important performance practice of this style is the "dotting" of eighth notes.¹ As discussed in regard to the Kenneth Gilbert edition of Bach's *Piece d'Orgue*, the alteration of the smaller rhythmic units has the potential to inject a piece with buoyant energy, that allows for a measure of individual interpretation.

Registration:

I. *Plein Jeu*

Ch: Gedackt 8', Principal 4', Octave 2', Scharff IV

Gt: Bourdon 16', Præstant 8', Octave 4', Mixture IV-V

II. *Duo*

Ch: Dulcian 8'

Gt: Rohrflöte 8', Spielflöte 4', Nasat 3'

III. *Trio*

Ch: Dulcian 8'

Gt: Rohrflöte 8', Spielflöte 4'

IV. *Basse de Cromorne*

Ch: Dulcian 8'

Gt: Rohrflöte 8', Spielflöte 4'

V. *Flutes*

Ch: Gedackt 8'

Gt: Rohrflöte 8'

VI. *Récit de Nazard*

Ch: Gedackt 8'

¹ *ibid*, 198

Gt: Rohrflöte 8', Spielflöte 4', Nasat 3'

Ped: Choir/Pedal

VII. *Caprice sur les Grands Jeux*

Ch: Gedackt 8', Principal 4', Sesquialtera II, Dulcian 8'

Gt: Præstant 8', Trompet 8', Cornet IV, Choir/Great

Ped: Trompet 8'

J.S. Bach

Chorale Prelude on *Nun komm der Heiden Heiland* (BWV 661)

A chorale prelude is a composition in which a chorale tune is set with an original accompaniment. BWV 661 is such a piece, using the chorale *Nun komm der Heiden Heiland* ("Savior of the nations, come" in English). This chorale is part of a set, commonly referred to as the "Leipzig Chorales". While there is little evidence that these eighteen chorales were intended to be an interconnected collection, with hidden meanings and theological symbolisms woven throughout, Williams points out that there are several smaller sets within the "Leipzig Chorales" which are more apparently intended to be seen as a unified group.¹

According to Williams, BWV 661 is the last piece in a set of three chorale preludes on the *Nun komm der Heiden Heiland* tune, each possibly representing a different theme associated with the life or attributes of Jesus.² The piece begins with a four-note motive (scale degrees 1, 7, 1, 5), which is used as the basis for the rest of the composition. Chromaticism makes a bold appearance in just the first four measures, with an abrupt transition to the minor-v key, d minor. Then, through a sequence of rising and falling scalar figures, *G* is tonicized, and another passage, with the four-note motive, now in the tenor voice, prepares for the entry of the chorale tune in the

¹ Williams, 339

² *ibid*, 369

Pedal (bass voice) in measure 24. The piece continues on, spinning new ideas out of the material in the section preceding the Pedal entry. Because of the relentless eighth notes in the manuals, and the awkward nature of several passages, a subtle use of rubato is essential to a successful performance of this piece to avoid it sounding breathless. For example, in the sequence beginning at measure 7, it is helpful to slightly lengthen the first eighth note in every other measure and to do likewise occasionally throughout the piece; this should be considered as a balance between articulation and timing/rubato.

Registration:

Gt: Præstant 8', Octave 4', Mixture IV-V

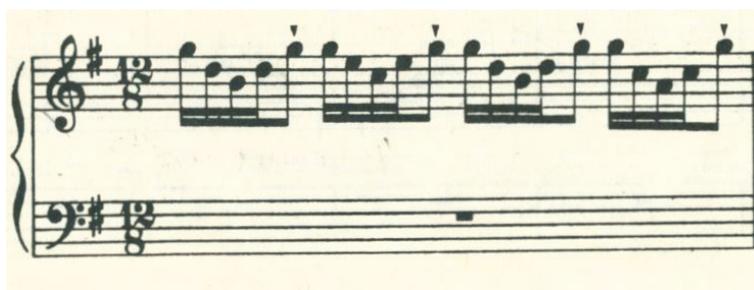
Ped: Subbass 16', Octave 8', Octave 4', Posaune 16'

Appendix A: Measure 1 of *Piece d'Orgue* from Differing Manuscripts

Example 1. Measure 1 from the Walther edition



Example 2. Measure 1 from the Hauser edition



Appendix B: Henry Purcell Ornament Table

Table of ornaments as shown in the Editorial Notes

of *Organ Works* (of Purcell), edited by Hugh McLean

Shake	
Beat	 or 
	(depending on the key)
Plain note and shake	
Fore fall	
Back fall	
Turned shake	

Appendix C: Specification for the Taylor & Boody organ at First Presbyterian, Tallahassee

Choir:

Gedackt 8'

Quintadena 8'

Dulcian 8'

Principal 4'

Spitzgedackt 4'

Octave 2'

Scharff IV

Sesquialtera II

Quint 1^{1/3}

Pedal:

Subbass 16'

Posaune 16'

Octave 8'

Trompet 8'

Octave 4'

Great:

Bourdon 16'

Præstant 8'

Baarpyp 8'

Rohrflöte 8'

Trompet 8'

Octave 4'

Spielflöte 4'

Superoctave 2'

Gemshorn 2'

Cornet IV

Mixture IV-V

Nasat 3'

Couplers:

Choir/Great

Choir/Pedal

Great/Pedal

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