

Chapter 22, Additional Materials

THE CHORALE PRELUDE

In 1517, Martin Luther started a movement (the Reformation) first intended to address certain problems of corruption in the Roman Catholic Church and eventually leading to the foundation of an independent branch of Christianity, the Lutheran Church. The main musical genre in the services of the new, reformed church, was the chorale, a type of hymn sung by the congregation to simple, tuneful melodies, originally in monophonic style. Because early hymnbooks contained only text (and most people were not able to read music anyway), it was customary for the organist to perform (usually to improvise) a brief prelude based on the chorale melody as an introduction to the singing, with the function of reminding the congregation of the tune. The **chorale prelude** soon became an independent compositional type and eventually developed into one of the major contrapuntal genres of the mature baroque in Lutheran Germany. Among many outstanding composers of chorale preludes one may cite Franz Tunder, Johann Pachelbel, Friedrich Zachau, Dietrich Buxtehude, Johann Kuhnau, Johann Walther, and J. S. Bach.

The chorale prelude as a genre features a great variety of compositional types and techniques. In general, one can expect that the chorale tune will appear in one of the voices (frequently the treble or bass), either presented literally in longer note values than those in the accompanying voices or elaborated by means of melodic diminution and ornamentation. Chorale preludes are thus *cantus firmus* compositions. A *cantus firmus* is a preexistent melody used, literally or in ornamented form, as the basis for a polyphonic composition.

A Chorale Prelude by Zachau: Vorimitation

Refer to anthology, no. 4 (Zachau, “In dich hab ich gehoffet, Herr”). This is a piece in three voices, in which the chorale tune appears literally in the treble as a long-note *cantus firmus*, while the two accompanying voices feature more active figuration. The chorale melody has six phrases, and the structure of the prelude is determined by these six melodic sections. Identify the six phrases, and number them on the score, from 1 to 6. Then study the tonal scheme for the piece: Mark all the cadences, and determine the key areas. You will find a simple and standard long-range tonal plan: establishment of the tonic, digression to the dominant, return to the tonic, and further extension of the tonic by means of a subdominant key area. In terms of key areas, this is the familiar progression I–V–I–IV–I.

Let us examine the specific contrapuntal devices at the beginning of phrases. Phrases 1 and 2 begin with points of imitation (mm. 1–3 and 8–9). Where do the subjects used in these two imitative beginnings come from? In each case, the subject is a rhythmic diminution of the respective chorale phrase. In other words, each chorale phrase is used to generate an imitative beginning which marks the opening of each section (the end of both sections is clearly marked by cadences on I and V, respectively). Because the original melodic material, however, is the chorale tune in the treble, we cannot say that the tune “imitates” the initial diminished subject, but rather that the initial diminished subject is a “foreimitation” of the chorale tune which appears after it. The German term *Vorimitation* is normally used to refer to this compositional device. Does Zachau use *Vorimitation* clearly in any other phrase in this prelude?

A Chorale Prelude by Walther: Melodic Diminution of the Chorale Tune

Refer to anthology, no. 2 (Walther, “Ach Gott und Herr,” verse 6). The original chorale tune is shown in example 22.6. How does the tune appear in this prelude? As in the Zachau example, it is presented in the upper voice. Here, however, it does not appear as a bare *cantus firmus*, but rather it is elaborated with melodic diminution. Circle all the pitches of the original chorale melody in Walther’s elaboration, and understand how his melodic diminution works.

From a contrapuntal and textural point of view, you will also see that here the upper voice blends in better with the other two voices, and as a matter of fact is often part of a **contrapuntal “give and take”** in which voices complement each other rhythmically (that is, when one voice is active the other one is not, and vice versa), as in mm. 9–10 and 14–16. Find other instances in this prelude of this type of “give and take” counterpoint involving the elaborated chorale tune. Finally, examine the beginning of each section. Are there any instances of *Vorimitation*?

Example 22.6 Chorale “Ach Gott un Herr”



Two Chorale Preludes by Bach: *Cantus firmus* and Canon

Bach’s production of chorale preludes is monumental (over 150), and it is contained in several collections, including the early *Orgelbüchlein*, the “Schübler Chorales,” the “Eighteen Chorales,” and, later in his life, volume 3 of the *Clavierübung*. The openings of two preludes from the *Orgelbüchlein* are reproduced in examples 22.7 and 22.8. The texture of chorale 2, “Gott, durch deine Güte,” is of the “continuous motion” type: The rhythmic relationship among the voices established in the initial measures is preserved throughout the piece. The upper voice presents the chorale tune in unornamented long-note *cantus firmus* style, while the manual bass (middle staff) carries a continuous “walking bass” in quarter notes, and the alto voice features a more active counterpoint in continuous eighth notes. The compositional challenge in this prelude is provided by the fourth voice, a tenor line played on the pedals. How is this fourth voice related to the upper-voice *cantus firmus*?

The compositional and contrapuntal challenge is compounded (to be exact, doubled!) in the prelude on “In dulci jubilo” (example 22.8). How are the four voices related? This is a **double canon**. Why?

Example 22.7 J. S. Bach, "Gott, durch deine Güte," from *Orgelbüchlein*, no. 2, mm. 1–13

In Canone all' Ottava

7

5

10

Example 22.8 J. S. Bach, "In dulci jubilo," from *Orgelbüchlein*, no. 10, mm. 1–16

(In Canone all' Ottava)

5

10

15

EXERCISE Listen to and analyze Bach's chorale prelude on the chorale "Wer nur den lieben Gott lässt walten," BWV 647. You will find this prelude in the *Six Schübler Chorales*, and also in the Arlin anthology (*Music Sources*). Note that the pedal part will sound one octave higher than notated because of the indication "4 Fuss." (4 feet). This line is thus really the tenor, while the left hand part is the real bass. Write a brief essay, on your own piece of paper, covering the following questions:

1. Where and how does the chorale tune appear in this prelude?
2. How would you describe the texture of this piece?
3. Mark, on the score, all the cadences and what degrees they are on. Then, based on the cadences and on the chorale phrases, determine the sectional divisions for the prelude.
4. Identify all the key areas in the complete piece. How are all the keys related among themselves?
The piece, of course, is in C_m. Although the key signature may appear misleading, it is not if you think of it as a modal signature (actually an archaic practice by the time Bach wrote this prelude). What mode with a C tonic carries this signature?
5. Circle pitches 1-4 in the original chorale tune (tenor, mm. 5-6), and label this motive "a." Now circle pitches 5-8 (mm. 6-7) and label them motive "b." How do these two motives appear in mm. 1-2? What is their role in the rest of the prelude? Are there any other motives throughout the prelude that appear more or less consistently?
6. How are the two upper voices related in mm. 1-5?
7. Can we speak of *Vorimitation* in this prelude?

BASS REDUCTIONS

Examples 22.9 and 22.10 feature bass reduction for two pieces we have analyzed in this chapter, Bach's Invention no. 3 in DM, and his Fugue no. 2 in Cm. The tonal/formal graph in example 22.9, for Invention no. 3, complements the formal diagram in the textbook's example 22.1. The graph in example 22.10 (for Fugue no. 2), on the other hand, complements example 22.4 in the text. Follow these two graphs comparing them with the respective scores, and understand how they represent the tonal and formal designs of these two pieces.

NOTE

For clarity of visual reference, in this and subsequent bass-line sketches showing the tonal/formal characteristics of extended compositions or sections, we will use white notes to signify the main key areas (rather than reserving white notes, as we have done so far, only for structural I–V–I progressions). In the DM invention, for example, the main key areas are I–V–vi–V–I, as you can easily verify by looking at the graph in example 22.9.

Example 22.9 Bass Reduction for Bach's Invention no. 3 in DM (Formal Diagram shown in Example 22.1)

Example 22.10 Bass Reduction for Bach's Fugue no. 2 in C minor (Formal Diagram shown in Example 22.4)