

CHAPTER 5

*Towards a genealogy of the keyboard concerto*

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In the spring of 1707 Handel performed his first oratorio in Rome, *Il trionfo del Tempo e del Disinganno*, a work that is often said to contain the first 'organ concerto'. The movement concerned is actually termed 'sonata' and the organ shares its solo role with the strings and oboes; nevertheless, there is no doubt that the organ has pride of place, taking the first solo episode in a curiously orthodox ritornello movement. The prominence of the organ would also presumably have advertised the presence of the composer in the solo role, something further suggested by the organ's continued obbligato role in the ensuing aria, where most of the B section is left blank, to be realised in accordance with the marking *arpeggiando per tutto*.<sup>1</sup> In common with much of Handel's early writing for concerted instruments (such as in *La Resurrezione*, 1708), both diverse and like instruments have to co-ordinate with one another in fast passages of thirds and sixths – thus, the virtuosity of the performance lies almost as much in the feat of ensemble as in the technical difficulty of the individual parts. This sort of writing unequivocally presents the organ as the melodic peer of the other instruments (Example 5.1); its very lack of specifically idiomatic keyboard figuration is testimony to its new-found emancipation from traditional keyboard roles, most obviously from the chordal duty normally demanded by ensemble situations.

While *Il trionfo* marked Handel's response to his first major libretto from Cardinal Benedetto Pamphili, at almost the same juncture in May 1707 he also became associated with his most significant secular patron to date, the Marquis Francesco Maria Ruspoli. One of the first works to issue from this relationship was the *Salve regina*, the central movement of which employs a solo organ, typically concerted in dialogue and in parallel with the strings and the solo soprano. It seems as if Handel set out to make his personal mark as a keyboard player as early as possible in his association with these two important patrons.

A few months later, on 4 February 1708, many miles away from Rome in the Thuringian town of Mühlhausen, J. S. Bach performed his first cantata in honour of the annual change of town council, 'Gott ist mein König', BWV 71. This too contains a solo part for organ,

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<sup>1</sup> As Carolyn Gianturco notes, the earliest surviving sources are not in Handel's autograph and probably date from some time after the Rome performances. However, there is no reason to doubt the role of the solo organ in the first version, or the likelihood that the shorthand direction for completion of the organ part stems from Handel's own scores. Carolyn Gianturco, 'Il trionfo del Tempo e del Disinganno: four case-studies in determining Italian poetic-musical genres', *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, 119 (1994), 43–59, esp. 57–8.



shared with flute and violin, in the Fifth Brandenburg Concerto towards the end of the decade;<sup>5</sup> and he develops numerous sonatas in which the keyboard plays a fully composed texture, working as an equal partner with a melody instrument. Handel occasionally visits again the concept of the keyboard obbligato within a larger work (e.g. in *Rinaldo*, 1711, here for harpsichord). However, his first 'pure' organ concertos (i.e. where the keyboard part is emancipated from any partnership with other solo instruments) begin to appear around 1733–4, and Bach's concertos for solo harpsichord – largely conscientious transcriptions of instrumental concertos – appear in a manuscript of c. 1737–9. The likelihood is strong that these latter result from Bach's practice of developing such concertos spontaneously in performance during his time as director of the Leipzig Collegium Musicum (from 1729); indeed, he might well have done this in the Cöthen or Weimar years as well. Given that he transcribed virtually all these pieces from instrumental concertos, it seems that he – like Handel – was perfectly happy to see the keyboard instrument on absolutely equal terms with other instruments, requiring no particular motivic pleading.

If we were still to use the 'Whiggish' approach to history, in which events of the past are seen to lead relentlessly and gloriously to a more perfected present, it would be easy to account for Bach and Handel's beguilingly co-ordinated dance (of which both were undoubtedly unaware) as reflecting the geniuses' inevitable intuition of the course of music history. Indeed, it is disarmingly easy to trace a genealogy from both Bach and Handel towards the keyboard concerto in its classic phase as personified by Mozart. After all, Bach's model was taken up by both Wilhelm Friedemann and Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, handed on from the latter to Johann Christian and thence to Mozart. Johann Christian, active in London, would also have absorbed something of the Handelian keyboard concerto culture, maintained by such close followers as Thomas Arne and John Stanley. The 'genius' model for Bach and Handel receives even greater support if we consider the work of the third 'great' composer of the age, working in equal isolation from the others, Jean-Philippe Rameau, whose *Pieces de clavecin en concert* – for obbligato harpsichord and two melody instruments – were published in 1741.

One strong reason to discard the Whiggish approach is the simple fact that the keyboard concerto as something at the forefront of compositional attention has declined considerably during the course of the twentieth century, however important it might remain in concert life today. It thus represents not so much a musical universal as a generic conception that – doubtless for a variety of changing reasons – grasped the attention of performer-composers over a specific time span. The purpose of this essay is not so much to offer a comprehensive account of the rise and fall of the keyboard concerto, but rather to try to imagine what factors of musical culture, thought and practice must have fallen into place to encourage Bach and

<sup>5</sup> Pieter Dirksen argues for dating this concerto back to the Weimar years, in 'The background to Bach's Fifth Brandenburg Concerto', in *The Harpsichord and its Repertoire: Proceedings of the International Harpsichord Symposium 1990*, ed. Pieter Dirksen (Utrecht: Stimu, 1992), pp. 157–85.

Handel to think along such similar lines, as if twins born into a common German tradition, but separated at birth. Another way of putting the question is to ask why the keyboard plays such a small role as a concerted instrument (as opposed to a continuo – or purely solo – instrument) before 1707. Given the richness of the German keyboard tradition in particular, one in which transcription and imitation of other instruments and voices is a major impetus in the development of keyboard style, the very lack of obbligato keyboard parts (ones that were notated, at least) in ensemble music seems truly astounding. My approach thus needs to take into account not only any small threads of tradition that might lead up to the early eighteenth century, but also the discontinuities – changes of practice, outlook and conception in composition and performance – that suddenly rendered the keyboard more attractive as a concerted instrument. After all, Bach and Handel could hardly have come up with the same idea if this were to have been inconceivable in the first place.

Given that the term 'concerto' and a variety of genres associated with it originates in Italy, this should perhaps be the first area of enquiry. Bach was profoundly influenced by the Italian concertos in the Vivaldian vein, and his adoption of the ritornello form perhaps reflects one of the most significant developments in his compositional thinking after the earliest years. The major impetus towards transcribing Italian concertos for keyboard seems to have come from the young Prince Johann Ernst, who probably heard the blind Dutch organist Jan Jacob de Graaf perform concertos in this manner. It might also be significant that Vivaldi himself employed the organ for small solo passages on occasion.<sup>6</sup> Whether or not Bach knew of these models, he certainly felt no qualms about transcribing a long violinistic cadenza from Vivaldi's *Grosso Mogul* concerto (RV 208) for organ (BWV 594). This must surely have played a part in his decision to provide an equally outrageous passage at the end of the first movement of the Fifth Brandenburg Concerto just a few years later, one that – as Pieter Dirksen has noted – seems purposely to exploit virtuoso string figuration at the expense of indigenous keyboard gestures.<sup>7</sup>

What Bach and Handel almost certainly could not have known at the time of their first organ obligatos in 1707–8 was that Vivaldi composed a sonata with obbligato organ at almost precisely the same juncture (RV 779).<sup>8</sup> Thus, the remarkable co-ordination of Bach and Handel is shared by yet another composer, albeit one who did not develop the genre of concerted keyboard much further. Although Vivaldi wrote this sonata for four specific female musicians at the Ospedale della Pietà in Venice, his autograph found its way to Dresden (together with at least two concertos with solo organ parts), where it might ultimately have influenced Bach. Indeed, the organ cadenza to the second movement (over twenty bars long) is not unlike that which Bach transcribed from Vivaldi's *Il grosso Mogul*, RV 208. In common with virtually all the solo keyboard writing mentioned so far (with the possible

<sup>6</sup> Michael Talbot lists ten examples in 'A Vivaldi sonata with obbligato organ in Dresden', *Organ Yearbook*, 12 (1981), 93.

<sup>7</sup> Dirksen, 'The background to Bach's Fifth Brandenburg Concerto', pp. 164–8.

<sup>8</sup> Talbot, 'A Vivaldi sonata with obbligato organ', 81–103.

exception of Bach's Cantata 71), most of Vivaldi's here is written in a violinistic idiom that would make it virtually interchangeable with other instruments. However, as Michael Talbot observes,<sup>9</sup> the third movement displays much more idiomatic keyboard figuration, including arpeggios shared between the hands, that could not be transferred unproblematically to other instruments. It is almost as if it took a composer who was primarily a string player to tailor a figuration specifically for the keyboard, while Bach and Handel – keyboardists in the first instance – seem to have gone out of their way to show how the keyboard could do just about what any other instrument could do.

Handel's exposure to Italian music was, of course, much more direct than Bach's, although his experience in concerted writing was formed largely by the Corellian, rather than Vivaldian, tradition. It might seem plausible to infer that Handel's organ solo in *Il trionfo del tempo* represented his desire to display his own vaunted skill as a performer, but it might also reflect an Italian practice that has left only the faintest of traces, perhaps because not much was notated in the first place.<sup>10</sup> Certainly, earlier Italian models do survive, such as Gasparini's written-out harpsichord parts to some of his 1695 solo cantatas,<sup>11</sup> but the most striking examples in instrumental music predate Handel's and Vivaldi's by over half a century. These point to a similar equivalency (and interchangeability) between the keyboard and the other instruments.

Biagio Marini's *Sonata per l'Organo e Violino o Cornetto* was published in his Opus 8 (1626–9),<sup>12</sup> as the composer's preface indicates, not only can the violin be replaced with a cornetto, but the upper organ line can also be replaced by a violin or trombone.<sup>13</sup> The two melodic parts make their entrances with long melodic solos of equal figuration and length, proceeding to an ever closer dialogue with one another. Frescobaldi's *Toccata per spinettina e violino* dates from exactly the same time (1628, in the open-score edition by Bartolomeo Grassi of Frescobaldi's *Il primo libro delle canzoni*). Again the solo lines are directly equivalent in their rapid dialoguing, and other instruments could be substituted. Nevertheless, Frescobaldi clearly makes more of the potential offered by the keyboard format by rendering the left-hand part – in addition to that for right hand – on absolutely equal terms with the two upper voices, effectively creating a three-part sonata texture. Although we have no other instances of concerted keyboard from Frescobaldi's oeuvre, his wider practice in instrumental ensemble is tantalisingly implied by the comments of the visiting viol virtuoso André Maugars (*Response faite à un curieux*, 1639). Frescobaldi was a harpsichordist in the

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 93–4.

<sup>10</sup> For a survey of some of the evidence for the keyboard taking over melodic lines in performance, see William S. Newman, 'Concerning the accompanied clavier sonata', *Musical Quarterly*, 33 (1947), 327–49.

<sup>11</sup> *Cantate da camera a voce sola* (Rome, 1695), see Kah-Ming Ng, 'Figured bass accompaniment at the harpsichord in its social and artistic context', D.Phil. thesis, University of Oxford (2001), p. 139.

<sup>12</sup> For the issue of dating, see Thomas D. Dunn (ed.), *Biagio Marini – String Sonatas from Opus 1 and Opus 8*, Collegium Musicum: Yale University, Second Series 10 (Madison, Wis.: A-R Editions, 1981), Preface, p. viii.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. x.

Lenten performances at the Oratorio del Crocifisso in Rome and was, according to Maugars, the most prominent performer with his 'thousand sorts of inventions'.<sup>14</sup>

Frescobaldi omitted the ensemble toccata from his own revised edition of the *Canzoni* in 1634. Perhaps he wished to keep a certain distance from the work (one that, after all, had not been present in his own edition that appeared at the same time as Grassi's, in 1628); did it perhaps display in too fixed a form the sort of material he improvised in live performance? It may well be that this piece reflects a rare notated example of a much wider practice, one whose mean stood between relatively literal intabulation of vocal or instrumental pieces and these totally independent lines for keyboard.

While most forms of Italian keyboard accompaniment in the early seventeenth century were derived from figured or unfigured bass lines, written-out parts may have been more numerous than the surviving sources suggest. An obvious – but extremely rare – example of a written-out accompaniment for keyboard in Italy that is independent of the other voices is found in Luzzasco Luzzaschi's *Madrigali... per cantare, et sonare* (Rome, 1601).<sup>15</sup> Almost certainly, most performers then – as now – would not consider there to be an essential distinction between a part that was notated and one that was improvised, but, as I will continue to stress throughout this essay, the 'fact' of notation can lead to subtle inflections both in the way a piece is realised and developed and in the way it is perceived by the wider circle of users and listeners.

One factor to consider is the format in which instrumental music was most commonly printed during the seventeenth century, namely partbook in movable type. This format rendered it exceptionally awkward to present a solo line for keyboard above its ubiquitous continuo line. The Marini example is thus unusual in presenting the organ within a *partitura* score that also includes the violin part. Grassi's edition of Frescobaldi is likewise in score format, something that distinguishes it from the composer's own editions of this collection. On the whole, partbook format – as the principal way of preserving works in notation – predisposed performers and composers alike towards single-line thinking. Keyboard instruments were a breed somewhat apart, associated with solo performance and arrangements (normally by means of intabulation or score-reading) of vocal and instrumental repertory.<sup>16</sup> But, most obviously in an ensemble context, they performed as 'foundational' continuo instruments. In other words, while the keyboard could be a means towards understanding and realising larger textures or providing chordal support, its role as a solo melodic instrument was less obviously defined. Indeed, the habit of thinking of the keyboard as a 'foundational'

<sup>14</sup> Frederick Hammond, 'Frescobaldi, Girolamo Alessandro', *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd edn, ed. Stanley Sadie, 29 vols. (London: Macmillan, 2001), vol. IX, p. 243.

<sup>15</sup> See Peter Holman, '"Evenly, Softly, and Sweetly Achording to All": the organ accompaniment of English consort music', in *John Jenkins and His Time: Studies in English Consort Music*, ed. Andrew Ashbee and Peter Holman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 359.

<sup>16</sup> For evidence of organists reading from score or separate parts during the sixteenth century, see Jessie Ann Owens, *Composers at Work: The Craft of Musical Composition 1450–1600* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 48–52.

instrument seems to have endured for many years. Frescobaldi's (or Grassi's?) choice of the designation 'spinettina' for the ensemble toccata may be telling, since, as Frederick Hammond has shown, an instrument of similar name (presumably a small harpsichord) is listed as an 'ornamental' rather than 'fundamental' instrument by the theorist Agazzari in 1607.<sup>17</sup> This designation might thus imply that Frescobaldi recognises the exceptional nature of this part, one distanced from the 'natural' function of the keyboard within an ensemble context.

Michael Praetorius, the principal importer of Italian practice into Germany, likewise allows an improvised melodic role (ranging from diminutions to full-blown lines) to the *Ornament-Instrumenta* (or *Unico* or single-line instruments). These can include those chordal instruments that are technically *Fundament-Instrumenta* (but only in the context of very small ensembles) such as lute and harp, and unequivocal melody instruments such as violin and cornetto.<sup>18</sup> The keyboard instruments – the *Fundament-Instrumenta* (or *Omnivoca* – those that can play all the voices in a piece) are consequently deprived of the privilege of melody.<sup>19</sup> As Praetorius tellingly puts it, the main difference between the ornamentists and the fundamentalists is that the former need to cultivate a good knowledge of counterpoint in order to be able to improvise (or even compose) new passages and parts.<sup>20</sup> While it is hardly likely that the keyboardist was the least cultivated figure in the art of counterpoint in 1619 (Praetorius is in any case addressing the two different kinds of lute and harp players at this point), there is obviously the implication that the fundamental and ornamental roles cultivate a different breed of instrumentalist. In all, then, the variability of instrumentation permitted in much Italian chamber music of the seventeenth century did not exclude the keyboard in a solo melodic role, but this was clearly not the obvious choice for most composers and performers.

The only country in which independent keyboard parts in instrumental ensembles survive in any number is England. The genre of the so-called 'fantasia-suite' with obbligato organ was first cultivated by John Coprario and was continued by William Lawes, John Jenkins and a handful of others.<sup>21</sup> For Coprario and Jenkins the organ often introduces the melodic material (both at the beginning and in subsequent interludes) but otherwise has a simpler texture that sometimes doubles that of the other instruments. With Lawes, the status of

the organ is more interesting. When his autographs for more than one version survive, these suggest that he worked the organ parts from simpler textures to more detailed four-part writing, and non-autograph organ parts (transmitted separately from the other parts – because of the greater degree of professionalism required to realise them?) often show greater elaboration than the surviving autographs.<sup>22</sup> In other words, the organ parts seem to be in a state of continual 'progress', a practice not unlike the varied realisation of the basso continuo, but with the organ's obbligato role formalised in the notation. If Roger North's later testimony is to be believed, one of the prime reasons the organ part was written out was because 'the masters never trusted the organist with his thro-base' as if to suggest that English organists were slow to acquire the necessary skills.<sup>23</sup> But whatever the reason, it is clear that this contingency created some keyboard textures that would have been unlikely had the parts been notated as bass lines alone.

Lawes's practice seems to come midway between the written-out continuo part, partly doubling the other voices, and the fully independent keyboard lines of Marini and Frescobaldi. Some of the time the organ provides a chordal frame, particularly in the dance movements where it often mirrors some of the melodic lines in thirds. In the most extended movement of each suite, the opening Fantazia, the organ tends to have a much larger and varied role. In general, it is less elaborate when the melody instruments are playing, particularly when they have very prominent figuration, such as the *concitato* figuration near the beginning of Suite No. 8 in D major.<sup>24</sup> Perhaps the most prominent obbligato role for the organ is (as it is with Coprario and Jenkins) to set up the material at the opening of the Fantazia (and sometimes at subsequent points within the movement), providing a quasi-polyphonic web into which the other instruments are subsequently 'built in'.<sup>25</sup> This gives the organ a sense of dominance from the beginning, at least until the imitative material runs out or the instrumental figuration becomes more lively. It comes closest to being a truly concerted part when it enters into sporadic dialogue with the other instruments: the Fantazia of Suite No. 8 in D major<sup>26</sup> is particularly ambitious, containing much material in three – and sometimes four – parts, and thus going even beyond Frescobaldi's example. Suite No. 5 in D minor<sup>27</sup> perhaps shows the greatest variety in the use of the organ within one movement where it ranges from simple chordal support to a toccata-like solo (bars 27–30), to a dialogue with one of the violins, to silence (at least in Lawes's autograph version),<sup>28</sup> to more fast passage-work and, finally, back to a chordal, loosely polyphonic texture. Perhaps the very ambiguity of the organ's role stems from Lawes's experience as a lutenist, where individual voices can appear and disappear out of a malleable chordal texture. As Petër Holman observes, composers of consort music who

<sup>17</sup> Frederick Hammond, *Girolamo Frescobaldi* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard University Press, 1983), p. 197.

<sup>18</sup> Michael Praetorius, *Syntagma Musicum*, 3 vols. (Wolfenbüttel, 1619; reprint, Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1958), vol. III, pp. 119–22 (erroneously, pp. 139–42), 146–9. See also Gregory S. Johnston, 'Polyphonic keyboard accompaniment in the early baroque: an alternative to basso continuo', *Early Music*, 26 (1998), 51–64, esp. 58.

<sup>19</sup> However, at one point, p. 119 (erroneously p. 139), Praetorius does allow 'Spinetten' to act as 'ornament instruments' in larger ensembles. But this instrument is missing from the main discussion of the improvisational role of 'ornament instruments', pp. 146–9.

<sup>20</sup> 'Aber hierin ist der unterschied / das uff diesen Ornament Instrument nötig ist / daß der Instrumentist vom Contrapunct gute wissenschaft habe / die weil man alda über demselben Baß / newer Passaggen, Contrapunct; und also fast ganz neue Parteien oder Stimmen Componieren muß: Welches in den Fundament Instrument nicht so groß von nöten ist.' *Ibid.*, p. 146.

<sup>21</sup> See Christopher D. S. Field, 'Fantasia suite', *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd edn, ed. Stanley Sadie, 29 vols. (London: Macmillan, 2001), vol. VIII, pp. 558–9.

<sup>22</sup> David Pinto (ed.), *William Lawes – Fantasia-Suiter*, *Musica Britannica* 60 (London: Stainer and Bell, 1991), editorial notes, p. xxiii.

<sup>23</sup> See J. Wilson (ed.), *Roger North on Music* (London: Novello and Company, 1959), pp. 300, 351; quoted in Holman, 'Organ accompaniment of consort music', p. 354.

<sup>24</sup> Pinto (ed.), *Lawes*, No. 16. <sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, e.g. No. 2 in G. <sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 8. <sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 13. <sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82.



were specifically keyboard players tended not to write out keyboard parts, as if to suggest that they derived their accompaniments directly from the score.<sup>29</sup> As with Vivaldi, writing his sonata with obbligato organ many decades later, it seems to take a composer who is not a specialist keyboard player not only to document the practice but also to create some of the most interesting textures for the keyboard.

While, in our story of the invention of the keyboard concerto, the English works might seem quite progressive, it is noticeable that pieces in a fantasia-suite genre from the Restoration era (e.g. Matthew Locke's) dispense altogether with the notated solo role for the keyboard.<sup>30</sup> Pinto assumes that this is because the obbligato organ was linked 'with outmoded large-scale contrapuntal textures'.<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, it would be strange to consider such textures entirely outmoded in an age when composers could be quite purposely archaic (e.g. Purcell's viol fantasias) and tended to treasure retrospective styles together with progressive ones. But Pinto's point clearly relates to the direct influence of Italian practice, in which, as we have seen, the keyboard is generally provided with the continuo line alone. However flamboyant the realisation of continuo lines may have been, the format of such parts for keyboard (where the bass line is generally the sole basis of the part) militates against the notion of solo episodes for keyboard, especially those with upper entries unsupported by the bass.

This brief concerted keyboard tradition in the first half of the seventeenth century would appear more archaic if we compared it with its antecedents rather than with an assumed 'goal' of the keyboard concerto in the eighteenth century. For the organ had had a somewhat similar role in the verse anthems of the Anglican liturgy (together with some canticle settings) as they developed in the later sixteenth century. These written-out accompaniments obviously have something in common with the various intabulation practices that began to accompany the polyphonic tradition throughout sixteenth-century Europe,<sup>32</sup> and there are plenty of sources to suggest that the organ doubles the voices in 'full' anthems. Nevertheless, the partly independent accompaniment seems a particular feature of English music, the verse-anthem tradition being a direct offshoot of the consort song (accompanied by viols). Indeed, some anthems appear in versions both for viol consort and organ (the latter presumably for stricter liturgical use). A similar approach to accompaniment, both accompanying the voices and providing introductions and interludes, becomes familiar in the genre of the English lute song. However, as Peter Holman observes, lutenists seem to have been quicker to convert to bass-line realisation (during the 1620s) than the keyboardists.<sup>33</sup> Thus while the Italians (and subsequently the Germans) tended either to intabulate the entire polyphonic texture or, increasingly, to reduce the accompanimental texture to shorthand notation of figured bass, the English (predominantly, if not uniquely) retained the concept of a fully worked-out,

<sup>29</sup> Holman, 'Organ accompaniment of consort music', pp. 368–70.

<sup>30</sup> For a brief survey of the transition to continuo parts, see *ibid.*, pp. 380–2. <sup>31</sup> Pinto (ed.), *Lawes*, p. xv.

<sup>32</sup> Holman, 'Organ accompaniment of consort music', esp. pp. 354–9. <sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 366–8.

and partially independent, texture. This endured until the time of stronger Italian influence after the Restoration.

Given the purposeful resurrection of the Anglican tradition after the Restoration, it is unlikely that the concept of the independent organ entirely dropped out of fashion, although composers of new works (specifically for the Chapel Royal) reworked the verse anthem with interludes for 'modern' orchestra rather than organ. Nevertheless, the use of the organ had expanded in another respect: the Commonwealth era had seen an enormous number of organs transferred from churches to private homes, inns and concert rooms, so that the instrument gradually gained a more secular identity than it did in most other areas of Europe. In this capacity it could have been used in any number of ways, accompanying, duetting and substituting for various instruments and voices. As Peter Williams notes, even the stricter Anglicans of the Restoration era attempted to proscribe the organ in church, specifically for its secular connotations.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, organs did not again become ubiquitous in parish churches until well into the nineteenth century. Given that those who were church organists in the early eighteenth century could not earn their entire living through service to the church (as they could in many other parts of Europe), they became accustomed to taking much additional work in the secular world and were often respected as public entertainers. Certainly this secular role of the organ must have played some part in facilitating the swift acceptance of Handel's organ concertos in concert practice; the composer would have been readily received as an organ virtuoso in the world of secular musical performance.

The German background to the keyboard obbligato tradition is perhaps the most complex and also the most problematic. Germany – particularly the Lutheran portion – provides the richest notated repertory of music for organ and harpsichord yet seemingly the slimmest evidence for the concerted role of keyboard instruments.<sup>35</sup> This immediately raises the question of whether the keyboard player somehow stood apart from the remainder of the musical culture – able to perform as a soloist or accompanist but not as an equal partner in vocal and instrumental pieces in concerted style.

First, within German Lutheran culture, as indeed within Catholic too, voices were privileged over instruments. Nevertheless, justifications for instruments were common, ranging from expressions of amazement that even dumb things praised God to the view that the cost of organs was analogous to the woman's 'wasteful' – yet somehow necessary – anointing of Jesus; to some, organs represented a mechanistic analogy for Creation itself.<sup>36</sup> Given the composition of Lutheran establishments, it was the cantor who traditionally stood at

<sup>34</sup> Peter Williams, 'Händel und die englische Orgelmusik', *Händel-Jahrbuch*, 12 (1966), 51–76, esp. 52.

<sup>35</sup> William S. Newman made much of Gustav Beckmann's identification of a keyboard obbligato sonata with violin, ascribed to Pachelbel ('Johann Pachelbel als Kammerkomponist', *Archiv für Musikwissenschaft*, 1 (1918–19), 267–74), suggesting that it is probably the first example of the 'accompanied clavier sonata': see Newman, *The Sonata in the Baroque Era* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1959; 2nd edn 1966), p. 225. However, given the obvious galant nature of the piece, it is almost certainly of later origin, and has been silently dropped even from lists of Pachelbel's dubious works.

<sup>36</sup> John Butt, *Music Education and the Art of Performance in the German Baroque* (Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 15–16.

the centre, the official director of singing and the vital link between church and school. Organists were thus slightly apart, were usually employed directly by the church rather than the school, and were generally of a lower social status. Sometimes the organist held a status as low as that of the town musicians (Stadtpfeifer, Stadtmusiker, etc.),<sup>37</sup> who, in addition to their town duties, were at the cantor's disposal. In Magdeburg the cantor ranked in the third social class out of nine, while the organist together with the Stadtpfeifer ranked in the seventh.<sup>38</sup> Perhaps this social conditioning accounts for the comparatively scant attention one of Magdeburg's sons, Georg Philipp Telemann, gave to keyboard music. His career culminated with the position of cantor in Hamburg, where the status of that office was particularly high, allowing him to dominate the wider city culture, including its opera.

This is not to say, though, that in places where the cantors were weak or extremely traditional, the organist could not take some of the initiative and build up a considerable music establishment in his own right.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, the organist was usually free from the jurisdiction of the academic head of the school, the rector, who was the cause of numerous disputes with the cantor, stretching right up to the time of Bach and beyond.<sup>40</sup> Indeed, it is possible to see the Lutheran organist as a figure who greatly enhanced the 'modernisation' of musical culture during the seventeenth century, specifically because he lay somewhat outside the establishment and had to forge his own career.<sup>41</sup> Buxtehude, organist of Lübeck, provides the prime example of a figure who took this opportunity for enterprise, outside the official cantorate. Not only did he acquire status by taking on a major administrative post in the church, he also arranged his own quasi-liturgical concerts with the support of the local business community. Weckmann of Hamburg was similarly enterprising, forming a Collegium Musicum in 1660.<sup>42</sup>

Organists of this kind thus engendered a sense of professionalised music making that was denied the cantor, who was normally bound to employ the services of school pupils.<sup>43</sup> In Handel's environment of Halle, the organist of the Marktkirche (or Marienkirche) was also somewhat exceptional in having control of the figural music (including the opportunity to present his own compositions), even though he did not belong to the school hierarchy. Thus, Handel's early studies with Friedrich Wilhelm Zachow (who acquired the Marktkirche post in 1684) might have cultivated in him an exaggerated sense of the organist's status. In Bach's Eisenach too, the organist of the Georgenkirche, his father's cousin Johann Christoph Bach, was unusually prominent as a composer; the particular respect which he seems to have earned

<sup>37</sup> Arnfried Edler, 'Organ music within the social structure of North German cities in the seventeenth century', in *Church, Stage, and Studio: Music and Its Contexts in 17th-Century Germany*, ed. Paul Walker (Ann Arbor and London: UMI Research Press, 1990), pp. 23–41, p. 25.

<sup>38</sup> Werner Braun, *Die Musik des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Wiesbaden, 1981), p. 27.

<sup>39</sup> Butt, *Music Education*, p. 19. <sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 24–33. <sup>41</sup> Edler, 'Organ music', p. 25.

<sup>42</sup> Butt, *Music Education*, p. 22; Edler, 'Organ music', p. 30; Christoph Wolff, 'Buxtehudes freie Orgelmusik und die Idee der "imitatio violistica"', in *Dieterich Buxtehude und die europäische Musik seiner Zeit*, ed. Arnfried Edler and Friedhelm Krummacher (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1990), p. 314.

<sup>43</sup> Edler, 'Organ music', p. 26.

from Sebastian is reflected in the archive of the Bach family's music which he compiled in his later years. Organists thus maintained an ambivalent position: traditionally they were of lower status (and, quite often, educational background) than the cantor, yet where they did predominate, they could be associated with the forefront of compositional activity (which was, incidentally, not a traditional requisite of the cantor's post). Indeed, so great was the threat to the cantor's dominance towards the end of the seventeenth century – and not all cantors were adept at composition (particularly in the modern 'Italian' styles) – that there was sometimes a feeling of shame if the organist was more advanced in this respect.<sup>44</sup>

If the 'average' status of the organist was somewhere between town musician and cantor, there may well indeed have been a common conception of him as a somewhat isolated, solitary figure. This sense of isolation is also reflected in the way organ books and parts were stored and maintained. Often these may have belonged to the organist himself, so that he could take them from one church to another as his career progressed. Inventories also tend to suggest that the organist's materials were kept separately from the music in the choir library, thus implying both a different function and perhaps a distinctive ownership. Stephen Rose notes that this sense of difference can also be reflected in the very format of printed music in the first half of the seventeenth century: the vocal parts might be printed in quarto while the continuo part appeared in the larger folio format.<sup>45</sup> Perhaps it was this very sense of separateness, sometimes reinforced by the physical remoteness of the organ itself, that enabled some of the more enterprising organists to cultivate their own musical interests.

One of the most significant differences between organists and other instrumentalists and singers lies in the notational tradition of 'new' German organ tablature, which endured well into the eighteenth century. Cleveland Johnson notes that some organists in the earlier seventeenth century transcribed entire printed collections of vocal music into tablature; many more compiled a miscellany from a variety of sources, presumably in response to the local needs for organ accompaniment.<sup>46</sup> Such miscellanies often show direct evidence of the organist's participation in the figural music: transpositions, realised continuo parts or the entire musical texture, and signs of heavy wear. Some manuscripts suggest that the organist could both realise figured bass and read from tablature notation, sometimes using the latter for older, more polyphonic styles;<sup>47</sup> others were a hybrid using both figures and letters.<sup>48</sup> Sometimes the tablature organ part might have substituted for choirs that had simultaneous duties in other churches or, in polychoral music, where the organ might have replaced one of the missing choirs.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Martin Fuhrmann, *Musicalischer-Trichter* (Frankfurt an der Spree, 1706), pp. 12–13.

<sup>45</sup> Stephen Rose, 'Music, print and authority in Leipzig during the Thirty Years' War', 2 vols., Ph.D. thesis, University of Cambridge (2001), vol. 1, pp. 178–80.

<sup>46</sup> Cleveland Johnson, *Vocal Compositions in German Organ Tablatures 1550–1650* (New York and London: Garland, 1989), pp. 62–3.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70. <sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 131. <sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 132–3.

Most instructive are those instances where the complete range of performance sources for a particular establishment survives, such as Levoca and Breslau.<sup>50</sup> Here we learn that the sacred concertos are intabulated into a complete full tablature of vocal and instrumental parts, and the latter frequently contain a figured continuo part. Thus the intabulated score could be used by either the cantor or the organist (assuming these were separate). The use of the intabulation by a director is suggested by writers as far apart as Praetorius (*Syntagma Musicum*, 1619)<sup>51</sup> and Werckmeister (1707), who notes that it was a practice of earlier years.<sup>52</sup> Robert Hill explains this wider role for tablature by the fact that it preserves the discreteness of voices to precisely the same degree as full score; indeed, it is far more efficient in the amount of paper it consumes.<sup>53</sup>

Scheidt's magisterial *Tabulatura nova* (1624) introduces the open score notation already familiar to organists in the Italian and South German traditions, but he notes that many German organists might be better off transcribing the music into the more familiar tablature format. Moreover, Michael Praetorius, writing just a few years earlier, translates several important examples in his *Syntagma Musicum* into organ tablature, for the sake of organists unfamiliar with staff notation.<sup>54</sup> As he later states: 'the majority of organists in Germany use the German letter-tablature (which to them themselves is correct, good, easy and more comfortable not only to play from but also to compose with) ...'<sup>55</sup>

It is thus clear that tablature was not merely a mechanical means for facilitating performance but could also be the primary medium of compositional thought. This seems to extend Jessie Ann Owens's claim that in the sixteenth century composers tended to use the same kind of notation and format for composing as they would for preparing the final version for performance or transmission. Vocal composers thus used mensural notation in separate parts while instrumental composers worked in the notation most characteristic of their medium of performance.<sup>56</sup> There seems to be a direct connection between format and genre within keyboard staff notation later in the seventeenth century. Froberger's principal sources show a very clear distinction between contrapuntal works in the 'old' style (full score), toccatas (six- and seven-line staves, similar to the format used for this genre in Italy and for most keyboard music in England) and dance suites (short-score in five-line staves).<sup>57</sup> Thus, despite the keyboard player's growing notational ambidexterity, many organist-composers

### *Towards a genealogy of the keyboard concerto*

might have failed to conceive of concerted parts for keyboard simply because it would have demanded an unorthodox format within the genre (i.e. a two-stave short score within a genre that was still primarily associated with individual, single-line parts).

Robert Hill disagrees with the notion of organ tablature being merely a mechanical means towards performance, in other words, basic instructions as to which key to press. Rather, he suggests that tablature notation is even further removed from a graphic representation of the keyboard than staff notation, thus forcing the musician to reconstruct the sound in the aural imagination;<sup>58</sup> staff notation was thus 'too easy' for the cerebral organist.<sup>59</sup> Perhaps it was this abstract connotation of tablature that made the organ world so remote to musicians of a more 'modern' disposition by the end of the seventeenth century. Telemann recalled how he had been frightened away from keyboard study by a 'stiff' organist who foisted tablature on his young pupil.<sup>60</sup>

As staff notation became the norm for keyboard music in virtually every other European country, German organists were increasingly isolated. Tablature is still evident in the early Bach sources and Bach himself was wont to use tablature as a compositional shorthand even into the Leipzig period.<sup>61</sup> On the other hand, the more modern thoroughbass was gaining inroads into German keyboard practice throughout the seventeenth century. Praetorius is one of the primary witnesses to the early dissemination of thoroughbass and also to its advantages. Not only can such parts serve a director by indicating the basic harmonic content of the texture, they can also be used by the organist as the model for a fuller intabulation. Praetorius shows the close connection between the formats by providing the same examples in full and short score and as a figured bass.<sup>62</sup> He notes that for those who have already learned to realise the new notation it relieves them of the burden of arranging their accompaniments in full tablature.<sup>63</sup>

As Johnston notes, Praetorius also shows that there are occasions when the realisation of the figured bass is indispensable, since it fills out chords that would be bare or incomplete without it; this clearly evidences the beginnings of figured bass, not merely as a shorthand for a pre-existent texture, but as the governing texture onto which the 'real' parts are mapped.<sup>64</sup> If the organ part is in one sense subservient, providing mere chordal accompaniment for the 'soloists', in another it dominates the whole through its control of the harmonic texture.

Not only was the new shorthand frequently mastered only inadequately during the first half of the century, but some theorists, even in Italy, such as Diruta (1609) and Banchieri (1609) felt that it undermined the very nature of polyphonic music.<sup>65</sup> This is echoed in Germany by Schütz, trained as an organist but, given the total absence of keyboard compositions

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79 and Rose, 'Music, print and authority in Leipzig', vol. I, pp. 175-8.

<sup>51</sup> Vol. III, p. 126.

<sup>52</sup> Quoted in Robert Hill, 'Tablature versus staff notation: or, why did the young J. S. Bach compose in tablature?', in *Church, Stage, and Studio: Music and Its Contexts in 17th-Century Germany*, ed. Paul Walker (Ann Arbor and London: UMI Research Press, 1990), p. 353.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 352. <sup>54</sup> *Syntagma Musicum*, vol. III, pp. 46-7.

<sup>55</sup> 'die meisten Organisten in Deutschland / der deutschen Buchstaben *Tabulatur* (welche an ihnen selbst richtig / gut / leicht und bequemer ist / nicht allein daraus zu schlagen / sondern auch daruff zu *Componiren*) sich gebrauchen ...' (*ibid.*, p. 146).

<sup>56</sup> Owens, *Composers at Work*, pp. 62, 113.

<sup>57</sup> John Butt, 'Germany and the Netherlands', in *Keyboard Music Before 1700*, ed. Alexander Silbiger (New York: Schirmer, 1995), pp. 184-6.

<sup>58</sup> Hill, 'Tablature versus staff notation', p. 352.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 356. <sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 351.

<sup>61</sup> Robert L. Marshall, *The Compositional Process of J. S. Bach*, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), vol. I, p. 53.

<sup>62</sup> Praetorius, *Syntagma Musicum*, vol. III, pp. 131 and 144.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129.

<sup>64</sup> Johnston, 'Polyphonic keyboard accompaniment', 55.

<sup>65</sup> Holman, 'Organ accompaniment of consort music', p. 356; Johnston, 'Polyphonic keyboard accompaniment', 51-2.



from his oeuvre, quite probably trying to distance himself from the type of thinking that keyboard culture was increasingly cultivating. In the preface to the *Cantiones sacrae* of 1625 he begs that even organists who can realise the continuo part (demanded by the publisher) make a translation into score or tablature in order to 'satisfy more sensitive ears'. By the time of the *Geistliche Chormusik* (1648) he remarks that the hegemony of the concerto style of composition based on the basso continuo has greatly weakened the study of counterpoint that should form the basis of all composition. Here again Schütz recommends that organists intabulate the motets. His tone suggests something of a rift between keyboard, 'basso-continuo' musicians (seemingly, a breed apart), and those who study 'true' counterpoint.<sup>66</sup>

Nevertheless, as the Italian concerted style took hold in Germany, the concept of the thoroughbass became ever more prevalent throughout the century, thus becoming the keyboard player's primary means of entry into the concerted field. Just as was the case in England, this probably worked against the concept of the keyboard player as the melodic partner of other instruments and voices, at least initially. Chords were realised from the bass line upwards rather than from a melody line downwards.

Not only did the 'modern' conception (and notational format) of continuo accompaniment militate against the idea of the keyboard player as soloist, but so did the persistence of the 'ancient' format of keyboard tablature. Thus the organist's sense of separateness would still have been part of the upbringing of Bach and Handel, however much they both soon displayed astonishing versatility. There may still have persisted a sense that different musical genres demanded different forms of notation and format; these in turn related to different classes and categories of musician.

So much for the disincentives for using the keyboard in a concerted context. What made it possible to conceive of this possibility in the era of Bach and Handel? While the keyboard's main role in concerted music remained bass-driven, chordal and accompanimental, every aspect of solo keyboard style was driving towards a greater comprehensiveness, imitating and adapting every stylistic gesture from other media and genres of performance. Mimetic styles are readily evident in the music of Samuel Scheidt, and the long expressive cantilenas of Scheidemann take a great deal from vocal and instrumental monodic practice.<sup>67</sup> Indeed, it is with Scheidemann that we have an early reference to the organ playing an arrangement of a motet in consort with a melody instrument, coming from the Hamburg poet Johann Rüst in 1658.<sup>68</sup> Much of the success of Buxtehude's organ works must lie in the composer's experience as a superlative writer of instrumental sonatas. The example of Nicolaus Bruhns also comes readily to mind, as someone who was not only well known as a virtuoso on

<sup>66</sup> 'some, amongst organists, have perchance the inclination to join in this slight work of mine, originally composed without basso continuo'; translation from Johnston, 'Polyphonic keyboard accompaniment', 56.

<sup>67</sup> Butt, 'Germany and the Netherlands', pp. 178–80.

<sup>68</sup> Annette Otterstedt, 'Lawes's division viol: pedigree of an instrument', in *William Lawes (1602–1645) – Essays on His Life, Times and Work*, ed. Andrew Ashbee (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1998), p. 336.

organ and string instruments but was also wont to play organ and violin simultaneously.<sup>69</sup> As Wolff suggests, Bach's tendency to arrange many string works for keyboard in his youth almost certainly stems from a fashion in the generation of Buxtehude and Reincken that has left few traces. Moreover, the organs of eastern Germany, specifically in the era in which Bach and Handel were brought up, show a remarkable drive towards sounds that imitate other instruments and voices, a decisive move away from the chorus-based *Werkprinzip* ideal of the 'classical' organs of the seventeenth century. It is perhaps not surprising that there is a reference to the use of the organ with an obbligato instrument (in chorale settings) by Bach's second cousin Johann Bernhard Bach (1676–1749), organist of the Georgenkirche in Eisenach after the death of Johann Christoph in 1703.<sup>70</sup>

One final reason, and perhaps the one that is most crucial, is the sea-change in compositional thinking that occurred during the course of the seventeenth century. Thoroughbass was devised as a shorthand, a way of condensing a polyphonic texture into chords that matched the progress of the voices. But like all forms of abstraction (including the notations and formats mentioned throughout this essay) it eventually brought about a change in the things it sought to present. Schütz could criticise it not just for the incompetence it allowed the organists of the age, but also because it – to his understanding – made a travesty out of the polyphonic, linear, conception of composition which was so essential to his upbringing and identity as a composer. Thoroughbass practice was thus not just second best; it had the potential to undermine the entire conception of compositional practice.

Of course, this is exactly what it did, although one could hardly lament the compositional developments that ensued. By the turn of the eighteenth century, thoroughbass practice was becoming the primary medium of compositional thought. German compositional treatises around the middle of the seventeenth century tend to treat thoroughbass as a subsidiary of composition proper: Herbst (1643), Crüger (1654), Printz (1676–7), for instance, cover the rules of counterpoint at the outset and provide advice on thoroughbass at the end, as if to suggest that it is useful only to those who have mastered the 'proper' rules of composition. However, later writers (from Niedt and Heinichen onwards) tend to place thoroughbass at the very beginning of compositional training, providing rules of strict counterpoint as a later, refining (and sometimes optional), stage.<sup>71</sup> This certainly seems to have been Bach's method, at least as transmitted through his pupil Kirnberger.

In all, then, this reflects the triumph of the keyboard-based approach to composition over that based on quasi-independent vocal lines. As an inherently practical method it engendered fluency in both performance and composition at a very early stage. It ultimately allowed

<sup>69</sup> Wolff, 'Buxtehude's freie Orgelmusik', p. 318.

<sup>70</sup> According to E. L. Gerber, *Neues historisch-biographisches Lexikon der Tonkünstler*, vol. 1 (Leipzig, 1812–14; reprint Bärenreiter: Kassel, 1966), p. 202; reference from Hugh McLean, 'Krebs's concerted chorales and fantasias', *Musical Times*, 122 (1981), 770–3.

<sup>71</sup> Butt, *Music Education*, p. 164.

one to imagine all musical textures and styles generated by the bass line as the fundament of the music. This is graphically illustrated in the second volume of Niedt's *Musicalische Handleitung*, in which he generates a host of musical forms and styles out of a single bass line.<sup>72</sup> Now every texture can be a variation of the chordal frame rather than the frame acting as a reduction of individual 'real' parts. So long as composers thought primarily in terms of the 'real' parts, it is not surprising that the partbook format of concerted music was associated with the independent status of individual lines (however loose the actual part-writing might have been). Now, though, in precisely the age in which Bach and Handel learned the basics of performance and composition, the theory of thoroughbass provided a window onto all forms and styles of music. It no longer would have seemed so strange for a keyboard instrument to represent both the bass of the music and a 'real' melodic voice. Indeed, with the growing dominance of the keyboard as the main point of access to compositional practice, it might have seemed increasingly absurd that the keyboard was not allowed to undertake both these roles simultaneously. Bach and Handel were living in a musical culture that allowed more flexibility and mobility than could have been possible only a few years before. Given the strong likelihood that both composers performed the solo roles in their works of 1707–8, the organ obbligatos emphasise their presence, personality and skill. They seem to be claiming a sense of individuality that few keyboard composers could have claimed before, such individuality being expressed – perhaps defiantly – through their own specific medium of performance, the keyboard.

<sup>72</sup> Vol. II (Hamburg, 1706), translated, with commentary, by Pamela L. Poulin and Irmgard C. Taylor, *Friedrich Erhardt Niedt: The Musical Guide* (Oxford University Press, 1989).

## CHAPTER 6

### *Couperin, Marpurg and Roeser: a Germanic Art de Toucher le Clavecin, or a French Wahre Art?*

*Davitt Moroney*

Contrary to the widely spread opinion claiming Bach to be the individual genius, in constant struggle with his surroundings, unrecognised, overcoming his epoch, we want to emphasise that Bach was necessarily a so-called 'child of his time'... Style is something greater and stronger than any genius.

Gustav Leonhardt (1952)<sup>1</sup>

The art of organ and harpsichord playing has often been the object of a certain amount of friendly rivalry between different traditions. Some players find it reassuring to relax in the comfortable conviction that they belong to the 'right' school. Behind almost all such well-defined traditions there lie players of striking originality, teachers whose ability to inspire by method and by example has given them exceptional influence.

Sweelinck's students justifiably considered themselves fortunate to have been formed by the legendary 'maker of organists' in Amsterdam. Bach's pupils, who certainly thought their master's organ playing to be more perfect than anyone else's, may also have taken pride in their remarkable musical lineage. As is frequently mentioned, this traces a direct line from Sweelinck via his pupil Scheidemann, who in turn taught Reincken and perhaps also Böhm, both of whom had a profound influence on the young Bach from the time he went to study in Lüneburg in the spring of 1700.

This essay is written in homage to today's 'maker of harpsichordists' in Amsterdam, from whom so many modern players trace their lineage as performers. It looks at some concerns typical of the classical French approach to harpsichord teaching in the early eighteenth century, as epitomised by the writings of François Couperin, and considers how Bach may have viewed the matter. Friedrich Wilhelm Marpurg's writings add an interesting Franco-Germanic perspective to the question. Finally, a little-known volume derived from Marpurg's work, Valentin Roeser's *L'Art de Toucher le Clavecin* (Paris, 1764), shows the French art of harpsichord playing returning to Paris after travelling to Leipzig and Berlin, almost fifty years after Couperin published his famous book with the same title.

<sup>1</sup> Gustav M. Leonhardt, *The Art of Fugue, Bach's Last Harpsichord Work: An Argument* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1952), pp. 53–4. This text has long been out of print. The quotation comes from the third section, 'General Remarks', which was omitted from the French translation by Jacques Drillon, *L'Art de la fugue, Dernière œuvre de Bach pour le clavecin: argumentation* (Paris: Éditions Van de Velde, 1985).