Filippo Mariottini

The Passacaglia by Johann Sebastian Bach

Interpretation perspectives

How the Bach score can lead to such different musical results

The documentation also includes the following recording: J.S. Bach, Passacaglia BWV 582, Filippo Mariottini
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1. Introduction

Johann Sebastian Bach left us his Passacaglia and Thema Fugatum, undoubtedly one of the greatest and magnificent musical pieces ever written. The exact date of composition is unknown but some similarities with the Dietrich Buxtehude Passacaglia in D minor, make musicologists infer that it was probably written in a period included between 1706 and 1717, at least after that Bach returned from the well known trip to Lübeck, where he met Buxtehude. Unfortunately, the Bach Passacaglia original manuscript is lost, therefore, the piece comes to us through copies. For this reason, it is unclear if it was composed for organ, pedal harpsichord, or even clavichord. The different manuscript copies, in fact, bear different titles and make it unclear to understand which instrument the work was composed for. Some of the different titles that can be found in the copies are:

“Passacaglia ex C b con Pedale di Giov. Bast. Bach”

“Passacaglia, con pedale pro Organo Pleno”.

“Passacaglia” with the writing Cembalo before the upper two staves and the writing Pedal before the bottom staff.

Given the unclear origin, the complexity and the singularity of the work, many generations of musicians gave their own reading to the score, often resulting in very different or even contrasting interpretations. Also orchestral, piano and various ensembles transcriptions were made. There are so many ways of playing the piece that the musical result assumes every time a different meaning.

Over the years I have collected and listened many recordings of the piece. All these recordings have one thing in common, they are very different, they are so different that in some cases, addressing the recording with the same title, Passacaglia BWV582, could be somehow considered inappropriate. The so different musical results have always fascinated me, because, they all derive from the same original composition.

I would like to study some of the most representative interpretations, enlightening some of the peculiar characteristics which make the given

1 Hartung, Carl August. Between 1760 and 1780. Berlin Staatsbibliothek
2 Unknown, probably 1750, Berlin Staatsbibliothek
interpretation unique. Each great interpreter has given to the passacaglia his/her point of view, giving emphasis to some aspects, looking to the artwork from a different point of view and filtering it through the lens of his/her knowledge and sensibility.

2. Main question

How can the Bach score lead to such difference in interpretative perspectives, and how can they create very different musical results?

3. Purpose

After decades of performances, recordings and philological studies, the analysis of the interpretation is more than ever important nowadays, in order for the musician to achieve a deep and thorough understanding of repertoire and interpreters. Moreover, the ultimate purpose of the music student, is not only to technically master his/her instrument, but also to be able to make personal and mindful interpretative choices, hopefully continuing the long rank of musicians of the past, who interpreted with awareness of the facts.

Therefore I decided to explore better the Bach Passacaglia, one of the most important artworks of the composer, through the analysis of some representative interpretations. I am sure that this research will help me to understand better the piece and the artists who interpreted it, moreover to give to it my own perspective, and broadly, to the repertoire that I will study in the future.

4. A definition of Passacaglia

The Passacaglia is a musical form constituted by a number of variations, composed upon the same ostinato melody. Its origin dates back to 17th
century and probably took place in Spain, then it rapidly extended to Italy and France.

The name “Passacaglia”, already suggests the non religious origin of this musical form, the word in fact derives from the union of the Spanish word “pasar” that means “pass through” and “calle” that means “street”. The Passacaglias in fact, where performed by street artists, with guitar, at the end of the songs or between the “stanzas”, which were the song verses. They were music in 3/4 with a typical dance style. The most important peculiarity of the musical form is that it consists of a number of variations, made on the same ground bass. Also the “Ciaccona” is a similar musical form, at the point that sometimes it is hard to find a difference between passacaglias and ciaconas. The most important difference seems to be that, the ciaconna maintains always the theme in the bass part, in the passacaglia instead the theme can also be found in other parts, but however mainly in the bass. In this regard, the Bach Passacaglia, presents the theme 16 times in the bass part and 5 times in the other voices.

Other differences between the ciaconna and the passacaglia are: firstly, often (but not always) the passacaglia is in a minor key, the ciaconna in major key; secondly, the number of bars of the main theme is generally different, it often consists of four bars in the ciaconna and eight in the passacaglia.

When the genre of the passacaglia spread out of Spain, abandoned its popular style and become a more thoughtful style, it become in fact a musical form used on the organ or keyboard instruments in general, with large use of counterpoint.

The Passacaglia nonreligious origin opens discussions on the actual origin of the Bach Passacaglia, which could be also attributed to the chamber music repertoire, even if it is nowadays considered as part of the organ repertoire. There are however theories which attribute a religious meaning to the Bach Passacaglia, such as Piet Kee theory, in which, to each variation, it is attributed a phrase of the “Our father” prayer.

Among the most important organ Passacaglias can be mentioned the Girolamo Frescobaldi Cento Partite sopra Passacagli(1637), Dietrich Buxtehude Passacaglia in D minor (after 1690), the Max Reger Introduction and Passacaglia in D minor (1899) and Introduction, Passacaglia and Fugue op. 127 (1913).

The Passacaglias where not only composed for the organ or keyboard instrument, but other examples can be found in orchestral music, such as the Johannes Brahms 4th movement of the 4th Symphony in E Minor (1884-85),

the Anton Webern Passacaglia opus 1 (1908 or before), the Dmitry Shostakovich fourth movement of the Symphony No. 8, Opus 65 (1943).

5. Bach Passacaglia

In order to better understand the Passacaglias various interpretations, I made an analysis of the general features of the variations which the piece is composed of, this, with a particular research on the rhetorical figure used by Bach, that give a particular character to each variation. I think that a work like this is very important when made on a piece like this, which is always different, even if the same ground bass and almost the same harmonic structure are repeated many times. What makes it always different and interesting in fact, is the melodic and contrapuntal development of the rhetoric “cell” upon the same bass.

5.1 Analysis of the Passacaglia Variations

Before starting to analyse the rhetorical figure in each variation, it is necessary to clarify the variation numeration method.

There are two different counting theories:

In the first theory, the initial eight bars are not considered as a variation, the first variation starts on the second repetition of the theme, from bar number 9. Consequently, the whole Passacaglia will consists of 20 variations plus fugue.

In the second counting theory, the initial eight bars are considered as a variation itself, so the Passacaglia will consists of 21 variations plus fugue.

I have decided to opt for the first counting theory, because, the opening phrase consists of the theme in the pedal alone, that is the statement of the theme, in my opinion it is not already a variation, it is the variation of nothing. The first variation comes right after, on the first repetition of the theme. Moreover, it is very rare to find theme-alone-starting pieces in 18\textsuperscript{th} century ostinato music; generally the pieces, starts with the theme accompanied with a harmonic/contrapuntal elaboration from the very beginning.
5.1.1 The Theme

The theme is eight bars long, it is probable, but not documented, that Bach took the first four bars of it from the “Christe - trio en Passacaille” by André Raison (Livre d’Orgue, Messe du Deuziesme Ton 1688). The only difference in fact is the tonality; in Raison’s Christe it is in G minor, in Bach Passacaglia it is in C minor.

**André Raison, Christe – Trio en Passacaille**
5.1.2 Bach, Passacaglia, Variation 1 and 2

The first and second variations are very similar from a stylistic point of view, it is very clear that Bach quotes the first measures of Buxteude’s Passacaglia, in them the composers use the figure of “sincopatio legatura”, a rhetorical figure in which a syncopation create dissonance which resolves upbeat.

In Bach, there is also the peculiarity that the dissonances do not resolve together, but in different moment instead.

**Buxtehude, Passacaglia in D minor, incipit**

5.1.3 Bach, Passacaglia, variation 3

In the third variation the “transitus” (characterized by passing notes) is the main figure, which appears gradually in the different voices.
5.1.4 Bach, Passacaglia, variation 4

In the fourth variation the “figura corta passus” is used on ascending and descending melodies (transitus), proceeding in parallel thirds, sixths and tenths. The figura corta is “a three-note figure in which one note's duration equals the sum of the other two.”

The energy of the piece starts slowly to increase here, thank to the use of semiquavers.

5.1.5 Bach, Passacaglia, variation 5

The following variation is built upon the same previous figure, but with a difference, the first two notes are divided by an interval of octave, third or fourth, so in this particular case the figure is called “figura corta saltus”, where “saltus” is a Latin word that means “jump”, “leap”. It is interesting to notice how the same rhetorical figure can create such a different effect by changing the intervals. In this variation, the wider interval used (in comparison with variation 4), increases even more the musical energy, also because the sixteen-note leaping figure is used even in the pedal, which presents a variation of the main theme with figura corta saltus and pauses, following the natural contrapuntal development of the other voices.

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From the sixth variation there is a significant change in the style of the piece. There is in fact a clearly recognizable group of three variations, in which the rhetorical style is the same, whereas the musical meaning can be interpreted as the opposite. Moreover, Bach uses all-semiquavers figures here, that contribute to increase the musical energy.
To be more precise, in the sixth, seventh and eight variations the “Anabasis”, the “Catabasis” and the “Antithesis” respectively are used.

Var. 6

The “anabasis” (Anabasis is a Greek word that means “going upward”, “to ascent”), similar to the “ascensus” (a Latin word with the same meaning), is an ascending musical passage which expresses ascending or exalted images or affections. The anabasis here is built upon a four-note figure, which appears consecutively in tenor, alto and soprano.

Var. 7

The “catabasis” or “descensus” (that means to descent) is a descending musical passage which expresses descending, lowly, or negative images or affections. The figure is generally built upon an eight-note figure (the twofold in comparison with the previous anabasis figure), this length is more systematically respected in the soprano voice, and it appears consecutively in soprano, alto and tenor.

7 Bartel, ibidem, p. 445
8 Bartel, ibidem, p. 440
In the last two variations there was parallel ascending and parallel descending motion, now there is contrary motion, namely the combination of both.

The “antithesis” is the combination of “anabasis” and “catabasis” together, is the application of opposing ideas in a passage to make the music more intense through highlighting and emphasizing contrast. Antithesis is a Greek/Latin word which means contrast, comparison, juxtaposition.

All these three variations are also based on the “tirata perfecta” and “tirata mezza” figures, that are a rapid scalar passage spanning a fourth (tirata mezza) to an octave (tirata perfecta). The Italian word “tirata” means: way, itinerary or work accomplished without rest or interruption. The word “mezza” means “half”. The word “perfecta” in this case is used as a rare Latinism which means “accomplished, completed”.

5.1.7 Bach, Passacaglia, variation 9

The ninth variation is built upon the “salti composti” figure, a four note figuration consisting of three consonant leaps. The salti composti consist of four rapid notes and three leaps. The variatio of these salti composti are
formed through the different movement and size of the intervals. The movement is eightfold, the first leap ascends, the second descends, the third ascends again. The Italian word “salti” means “jumps”, the Italian word “composti” instead is an adjective that means “made up of”, “something that is the result of the union of several elements”.

Here the pedal shows a varied form of the main theme, taking part in the contrapuntal development of the higher voices; the Passacaglia theme essential notes§, still take place in the bass but in a varied form, given by the use of the rhetorical figure.

5.1.8 Bach, Passacaglia, variation 10, 11 and 12

Now it comes another three-variation group, again associated by the “tirata” figure.

Variations 10 and 11 present continuous grading scales (gradatio) of sixteenth-notes, in the higher part before and then in the lower part.

Var. 10

Var. 11

Var. 12

The twelfth variation is a moment of climax of the entire Passacaglia. The theme is in the soprano part, while in the other three voices takes place the contrapuntal development, starting in the pedal with sixteen note figure, the “tirata”. Here the figure is built upon descending broken thirds scale, instead of simple grading scales, and it is counterpointed in contrary motion with a grading-ascending quaver figure. This is the only variation with semiquavers in the pedal. This entrance of the pedal with semiquavers makes a strong effect, also because this variation is preceded and followed by variations with no pedal. This is also the golden section point of the Passacaglia in fact: $\frac{21}{1.618} = 12.9$ (where 21 is the number of variations including the opening theme and 1,618 is the golden section number). It is also possible to calculate the golden section point with the Passacaglia number of bars: $\frac{169}{1.618} = 104.45$. Bar number 104 is the second to last bar of the twelfth variation.

5.1.9 Bach, Passacaglia, variation 13

At this point of the Passacaglia, after the previous climax, Bach start to remove voices in each variation, passing to three, two and one voice. So, the musical energy starts to decrease for a while.
The rhetorical figure used in variation 13 is the “circulatio”, a series of usually eight notes in a circular or sine wave formation\textsuperscript{12}. Here the theme is hidden by the rhetorical figure, in the alto voice.

5.1.10 Bach, Passacaglia variation 14

In variation fourteen we have two voices only, the theme is still recognizable but hidden within the arpeggios. Two main figures are used: the “contrapositum” and the “figura suspirans” or “suspiratio”. The contrapositum (a Latin word which means “counterposed”) because there are two voices moving towards opposite directions. The suspiratio is a musical expression of a sigh through a rest\textsuperscript{13}. The word “suspiratio” in fact derives from the Latin verb “suspirare” which means “to sigh” or “to groan”.

5.1.11 Bach, variation 15

Only one voice is remaining in this variation, which is characterised by a single consonant leaps ascending arpeggio. The notes of the main theme are the base from where the arpeggios start their movement. The figure used is the ascensus, an ascending musical passage which expresses ascending or

\textsuperscript{12} Bartel, ibidem, p.440
\textsuperscript{13} Bartel, ibidem, p. 443
exalted images or affections\textsuperscript{14} which has the same function of the anabasis mentioned above.

5.1.12 Bach, variation 16

In variation sixteen there is a strong and unexpected musical contrast, in fact, if on the last three variations (13, 14, 15) the musical texture loses his density, passing gradually from four to one voice with consonant leaps, the new variation is characterized by descending voices which create strong dissonant chords resolving in consonant ones.

From a rhetorical point of view, this variation is very rich. There is the figura suspirans, given that the descending movement starts with a pause. Furthermore, the prolongation of the dissonance is called extensio, from the Latin verb “extendō” which means “to prolong”.

5.1.13 Bach, variation 17

The next variation is built upon two voices very fast sixteen-note triplets, it is not possible to find correspondence between the musical material and a specific rhetorical figure, but there is great musical contrast with the previous and following variations. Moreover, the relatively high pitched fast

\textsuperscript{14} Bartel, ibidem, p. 445
triplets movement, contribute to intensify the gravity and the deepness of the slow passacaglia theme in the pedal.

5.1.14 Bach, variation 18

![Musical notation](image1.png)

Variation eighteenth, is characterized by the *sincopatio figura corta*, because the figure starts upbeat. The figure is simultaneously used in two voices moving in parallel sixths or tenths.

5.1.15 Bach, variation 19 and 20

**Var. 19**

![Musical notation](image2.png)

Variation 19 is characterized by an ornamented-double pedal point, with two voices that imitate themselves; in variation 20 the same style is used but the parts used for the pedal point are even doubled and inverted (in comparison with the parts in variation 19)

The main figure used is clearly the *circulatio, a series of usually eight notes in a circular or sine wave formation*\(^\text{15}\).

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\(^{15}\) Bartel, ibidem, p. 440
Var. 20 and beginning of Thema Fugatum

The twentieth variation is the last one, then, after the majestic eight voices C minor chord, the “Thema Fugatum” starts.

A very interesting peculiarity of the Thema Fugatum is that it is the only case, in Bach, in which the fugue is strongly connected with the preceding musical form, not only by the key. (as it usually happens in other works, such as Preludes and fugue, Toccatas and fugue, Fantasias and Fugue), but also by other elements.

Firstly, the first note of the fugue is already contained in the last chord of the last Passacaglia variation, thing that opens discussion for interpretation perspectives. Generally musicians opt for one of the following choices.

1) Playing the last Passacaglia chord, making a rest and starting the Thema Fugatum from the C (first note of the subject).
2) Playing the last Passacaglia chord, leaving all the chord voices except for the middle the C, which constitute the Fugue subject first note and continuing along the fugue without any rest.

3) Playing exactly as the score is written, namely, playing the Passacaglia last chord and with no rest starting the fugue from the G, second note of the Thema Fugatum subject.

Another very important (even more than the previous) characteristic which strongly links the Thema Fugatum, with the Passacaglia, is the subject. The subject in fact is exactly the first half of the Passacaglia main theme. Also the first counter subject it is built upon melodic material of the second half of the Passacaglia theme. These common elements contribute to make the Passacaglia and Thema Fugatum as a unique piece, so that the piece is generally named as “Passacaglia” only, implying also the Thema Fugatum.

The Thema Fugatum, for the structure of the exposition and development modulations can be considered as a classic fugue, even if the author doesn’t names it with the classic name of “fugue”. The harmonic structure of the fugue in fact is the following:

Exposition: Cm, Gm, Cm, Gm, Cm.

Development: EbM, BbM, Gm, Cm, Gm, Fm, Cm.

After the last statement of the subject in C minor, in the higher range of the soprano voice, there is a dramatic suspended cadence which bring to a coda in C major and to one of the greatest ending of the music history.

### 5.2 Differences between Bach and Buxtehude

#### Passacaglia

It is well known that J.S. Bach took inspiration from previous and contemporary composers, one of the most influential and admired was undoubtedly Dietrich Buxtehude.

Buxtehude, was one of the most prolific composer before Bach, he wrote preludes, toccatas, fugues, choral preludes, chaconnes, a passacaglia, vocal and orchestral works.

It is interesting to make a comparison between the Buxtehude and the Bach Passacaglia. The resulting works are very different; the Buxtehude work is brilliant, but it doesn’t have the monumentality of the Bach work, anyway,
the influence is subtle but critical, the Bach Passacaglia would not have not been as it is, without the Buxtehude legacy.

The Buxtehude Passacaglia is written in D minor and contains three modulations, it consists of four groups of seven variations, each of them in a different tonality: D minor (7 variations) – F major (7 variations) – A minor (7 variations) – D minor (7 variations). The number of variations is $7 \times 4 = 28$. The number 7 is associated to perfection, for example, as the days in which God creates the Universe; the number 28 refers to the moon and its phases. It’s very interesting the interpretation given by the organist Piet Kee related to the moon phases, he says in fact: “You can perform the Passacaglia according to the four phases of the moon (new moon, waxing moon, full moon, waning moon), and when you return in the last phase to the registration of the beginning it is so logical and beautiful, and listeners understand it—consciously or unconsciously—so much better”\textsuperscript{16}

The theme used is anacrusic, four bars long and it is always played by the Pedal. The measure is in 3/2. There is no fugue.

The Bach Passacaglia is written in C minor and it never modulates, the number of variations is 21 (including the Thema Fugatum). The theme is anacrusic, eight bars long and it can be divided in two parts. It is not always played in the pedal. The measure is in 3/4. A peculiarity of the beginning of the piece, not found in Buxtehude, is that it starts with the pedal only, that enunciates the theme not accompanied with the keyboards.

6. Interpretation analysis

Organ interpretations

According to the interpretation tradition, there are two different performance praxis related to the Passacaglia.

The first is in “Organo Pleno”, as indicated in one of the manuscript copies.

Organo pleno is a typical baroque registration, used on great pieces such as Toccatas, Preludes, Fantasias etc… It’s built by using, from the beginning to the end of the piece, all the ranks of Principal stops (8’, 4’, 2’, 2 2/3’, mixtures etc.) both in manuals and pedal, no flutes, plus the 16’ foot reed in the pedal.

The second is more “Romantic”, and consists in building a sort of Crescendo, starting “piano” with few stops, adding some stops in each variation and ending “forte” with the full organ. It was probably Franz Liszt who firstly had the idea to interpret the Passacaglia in this particular way. Johann Gottlob Töpfer wrote an arrangement based on Liszt indications.

Of course, these are general rules and every worthy of respect organist, interpret the rule on its own way, according to the opinion that he or she has about the piece and also according to other important aspects, such as, the organ style, disposition, room acoustic and so on.

In the recordings that I decided to present, it is possible to well understand this concept, in fact, both the praxis are used by the interpreters, besides in a very personal way. The reason why I chose the following recordings is that they are emblematic in their own characteristic, so, they offer a great chance to underline the peculiarities and differences.
6.1 Fernando Germani

LP
His master’s voice, 1961, LP CSD1318

Web link to the recording:
https://open.spotify.com/track/6WUMXKYu2qaBiDQJ4vk4gC

Fernando Germani was one of the greatest organ virtuoso of all time. Organ professor at “Accademia di Santa Cecilia” from 1934 to 1976, organist in St. Peter, Vatican city from 1948 to 1959, head of organ department at Curtis institute of Music of Philadelphia from 1931 to 1933. He had a very large repertoire, particularly, he interpreted the complete organ works by Frescobaldi, Bach, Franck and Reger.

Germani recorded the Bach Passacaglia at the Royal festival hall of London in 1960. The organ of the hall was built between 1950 and 1954 by the renowned organ makers Harrison & Harrison.

It is very important, in order to understand better an interpretation, to be acquainted with the particular instrument used for the recording. The organist interpretation in fact, is obviously driven by his/her concept about the piece, but is also influenced a lot by the instrument, that is why an
organist will never play, on different organs, the same piece in the same way.


### THE ROYAL FESTIVAL HALL

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<th>CHOEUR ORGAN</th>
<th>SWELL ORGAN</th>
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<td><strong>Major Bass</strong></td>
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<td>76. Gemshorn (conical)</td>
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<td><strong>Sub Bass</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Quintadena</strong> (from 74)</td>
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<td>90. Vex Humana</td>
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<td><strong>Schalmie</strong> (from 53)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td><strong>XVII Translant</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cornett</strong></td>
<td>2</td>
<td><strong>XVII Translant</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### GREAT ORGAN

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PEDESTAL ORGAN</th>
<th>CHOEUR ORGAN</th>
<th>SWELL ORGAN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Principal</strong></td>
<td>16</td>
<td>74. Quintadena</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gedackt</strong></td>
<td>16</td>
<td>75. Diapason</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Diapason</strong></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>76. Gemshorn (conical)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Principal</strong></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>77. Quintadena</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Harmonic Flute</strong></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>78. Viola</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rohrflute</strong></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>79. Celeste</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Flute</strong></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>80. Principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Flute</strong> (stopped)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>81. Koppellinie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Quint</strong></td>
<td>1½</td>
<td>82. Nazard (conical)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Octave</strong></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>83. Octave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sesquialtera 26.31</strong></td>
<td>½</td>
<td>84. Open Flute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mixture 29.33.36.40</strong></td>
<td>½</td>
<td>85. Tincere (tent f)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cromorne</strong></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>86. Flageolet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Schalmie</strong></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>87. Mixture 22.26.29.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>IX Translant</strong></td>
<td><strong>XVIII swell to swell</strong></td>
<td><strong>XVIII swell to swell</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### ACCESSORIES

- General swell action
- Full organ action
- Stopper, operating general pedals
- General crescendo pedal
- Balanced expression pedals to the Choeur, Swell and Solo Organ
- The actions are electro-pneumatic
- The manual compass is 61 notes; the pedal compass is 32 notes

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Eight general pistons (duplicated by foot pedals)
Eight foot pedals to the Pedal Organ
Eight pistons to the Choeur and Positive Organs (combined)
Eight pistons to the Great Organ
Eight pistons to the Swell Organ
Eight pistons to the Solo Organ
Reversible pistons: I/IV, VI/VII, XIII, XIV, XV, XVIII
Reversible foot pistons: I/IV
By reading the organ specifications it is possible to infer that, the organ was built by taking inspirations from the German baroque style, given that it contains the typical stops of an organ of that period and country. It was the dawn of the Organ Reform Movement, the particular organ building trend, originated in Germany in 20th century, in which the new organs where built following the German Baroque style.

The Fernando Germani use of the organ is very original, it is not possible to ascribe neither the adjective “Baroque” nor “Romantic” to it. It is neither a flat Organo Pleno nor a romantic Crescendo. For each variation, or group of variations, is used a different registration.

The registration changing are very natural and respect the organ features.

One of the fundamental feature of the organ in fact, is that is developed in divisions, the division is a group of stops controlled by one single keyboard. It is possible to change sound colour and/or volume by changing keyboard; this technique is known as “terraced registration” or “terraced dynamic”\(^{17}\). It is impossible to have a continuum in which different volumes and timbres modulate, it is a sort of discrete succession of sounds. Only some romantic organ approaches this concept and it is not the case of the royal festival hall organ.

M° Germani, prepares different sound level on the different keyboard and, when needed, changes keyboard. Certainly, he also adds or removes stops, but always on the base of the terraced dynamic technique.

The personality he gives to each variation is supported by the way he use the registration.

Each variation has different character and its own sense of completion but it is also linked to the others; while listening to the recording it is possible to imagine attending a picture exhibition, observing different paintings (the passacaglia variations) of the same collection.

This concept is also supported by the use of the tempo: in each variation there is a tempo changing, sometime so slight that is nearly not perceivable. However, in general, the tempo tendency is to increase speed along the length of the piece; this is after all, a general feature of the Passacaglia as a musical form. The special way in which the interpreter leads the tempo gives to the passacaglia a distinctive character of impetus and excitement.

Another peculiarity is that he “cuts” the value of the last notes of some variations, this because he wants to make clear the incipit of the new ones. In the Bach score in fact, the first notes of the new variation, often take

place in the last chord of the previous variation, so the ending of a variation and the beginning of the next one are overlapped. The risk of playing exactly as the score is written is that the starting point of the following variation results to be hidden. Of course, the way in which the score is written, is the natural way of writing music, it would be artificial and contorted, to write as it should sound, namely, writing the last chord alone and separated by the beginning of the new variation, also because, the variation, are each one part of the same piece, they are not a sequence of independent episodes.

The following example shows that the ending of variation number 3 and the beginning of variation number 4 are overlapped.

In the performance, a way to make clear the beginning of the new variation, is to cut the chord of the previous variation (as Germani does), but, in order to give a good rendering of this musical concept, a great grade of tempo management as to be used, the length of the last chord is in fact crucial, if it is too long, the musical flow interrupts, if it is too short, the variation ending break off too abruptly. Of course, also the way the interpreter approaches the variation ending is critical.

It is interesting, to conclude with the words of Fernando Germani itself, which explains the Passacaglia.

“Questa meravigliosa composizione, l’unica del genere che sia stata composta da J. S. Bach, è resa nella sua massima monumentalità dallo strumento alla cui letteratura è ormai legata, in modo indissolubile. In essa non vi si trova il frammentarismo di alcuni contemporanei di Bach (Haendel), né la superficialità e la frivolezza francese, ma è l’opera d’arte nel più elevato senso della parola e che comprende la scienza e l’ispirazione; l’una a completamento dell’altra. La continuità del pensiero, nell’intero lavoro, è tale da suggerire il paragone che le Variazioni siano
This marvellous composition, the only on its genre ever composed by Bach, is rendered on its best monumentality by the instrument of which repertoire is linked at this point, in indissoluble way. It is not possible to find neither the fragmentarism of some Bach contemporaries in it, nor the French superficiality and frivolity, but it is the artwork in the highest sense of the word and which contains both knowledge and inspiration; the one on completion to the other. The continuity of thought, along the whole work, is such great that it suggests the comparison that the Variations are granite rocks that joined together, they form the Passacaglia great monument.

(This English translation is non-official and made by myself).

6.2 Karl Richter

Web link to the recording:

1. Passacaglia
   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bkQxrdOk8Us

2. Thema Fugatum
   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TOnNMXPggVs

Karl Richter (1926/1981) was a German organist, harpsichordist, conductor and choirmaster, best known as one of the greatest Bach interpreters of the 20th century. A pupil of Karl Straube and Günter Ramin, elected organist at the Thomaskirche in Leipzig as one of the successors of Johann Sebastian Bach. He founded the Münchner Bach-Orchester and the Münchner Bach-Chor, with them he realised an extraordinary Bach music interpretation activity, doing a great number of recordings and performing all around the world.

One of the Richter’s Passacaglia recording was made in 1969 on the “Dreifaltigkeitsorgel”, one of the three organs of the Ottobeuren Basilica. The organ was completed in 1766 by Karl Joseph Riepp and is brother Rupert. This organ is peculiar because it shows a mixture between the German and the French baroque style. The Riepp brothers in fact lived and

18 Text taken from the theatre program of the Accademia di Santa Cecilia concert, 4 January 1974. Roma, Sala Academica, via dei Greci
worked in France for some years. During that period they were evidently influenced by the local organ building style.

Shown below are the organ specifications.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Hauptwerk:</strong></th>
<th><strong>Brüstungspositiv:</strong></th>
<th><strong>Echo:</strong></th>
<th><strong>Pedal:</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Copel 16</td>
<td>Principal 16 D</td>
<td>Copel 8 B/D</td>
<td>Principal 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal 8</td>
<td>Flauta 8 B/D</td>
<td>Flet 4 B/D</td>
<td>Copel 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flauta 8</td>
<td>Copel 8 B/D</td>
<td>Quint 2 2/3</td>
<td>Copel 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copel 8</td>
<td>Prestant 4</td>
<td>Quart 2</td>
<td>Octav 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gamba 8</td>
<td>Flet 4</td>
<td>Tertz 1 3/5</td>
<td>Gamba 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salice 8</td>
<td>Gamba 4 B/D</td>
<td>Larigot II</td>
<td>Quint 5 1/3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Octav 4</td>
<td>Nazard 2 2/3 B/D</td>
<td>Tertz II</td>
<td>Mixtur III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flet 4</td>
<td>Quart 2 B/D</td>
<td>Hoboi 8 B/D</td>
<td>Flet 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tertz 3 1/5</td>
<td>Tertz 1 3/5 B/D</td>
<td>Tremolo dous</td>
<td>Trompet 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quint 2 2/3</td>
<td>Quint 1 1/3 B/D</td>
<td>Tremolo forte</td>
<td>Trompet 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waldflet 2</td>
<td>Fornit V-VI B/D</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tertz 1 3/5</td>
<td>Trompet 8 B/D</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixtur IV</td>
<td>Cromorne 8 B/D</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cimbal IV-VI</td>
<td>Voxhumana 8 B/D</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cornet V</td>
<td>Clairon 4 B/D</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trompet 8</td>
<td>Tremolo forte</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clairon 4</td>
<td>Tremolo dous</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tremolo forte</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Tremolo dous</td>
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</table>

Regarding the Karl Richter interpretation, we can say that it is very intimate and fully reflects the personality of the interpreter. He plays on a baroque organ, with a very rich registration, spanning from the pianissimo to the fortissimo, from gentle and mild, to strong mighty and tart sounds. It would have been simpler for him to set a fixed registration for each keyboard and he could have used it when needed, but he wanted more. With the help of an assistant (it would have been impossible without him on an organ like this) he created a very refined registration, each variation has a different sound; he really used all the organ resources, except for the third keyboard, that on this organ it contains a cornet only, it would have been inappropriate on this music. On the last two variations he doubles the first half of the pedal theme an octave lower, this gives a sort of 32’ foot effect which adds gravity and eminence.

The result is a very profound Passacaglia, which, with the contribution of a very “wide” registration, has a great dynamic, both on its sound and, as aimed consequence, on its intimate meaning.
The tempo is generally steady and marked, with some little changes between some variations, generally lento. The articulation is emphasized but the overall is legato, probably he has to articulate a lot because the keyboards are heavy.

With a breath he divides the theme in two specular parts, exactly in the centre, this could reflect the fact that the theme used by Bach is made up of two parts, as I explained in the analysis. Musically it makes sense, because the second part of the theme seems to be a sort of “answer” to the “question” stated in the first half.

6.3 Ton Koopman

Web link to the recording:

https://open.spotify.com/track/4sm536UKcsW1cYy9OpghIn

Ton Koopman (Zwolle, 1944) is a Dutch organist, harpsichordist, conductor and musicologist. He studied Organ with Simon C. Jansen and harpsichord with Gustav Leonhardt. Naturally attracted by historical instruments and fascinated by the philological performance style, Koopman concentrated his studies on Baroque music, with particular attention to J.S. Bach, and soon became a leading figure in the "authentic performance” movement.19


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19 Ton Koopman Website http://www.tonkoopman.nl

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The recording was made in the Grote of Jacobijnerkerk in Leeuwarden, Netherlands.

The Jacobijnerkerk organ was built by Christian Müller from 1724 to 1727. It is a good and well preserved example of Dutch baroque organ.

Organ Specification:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hoofdwerk</th>
<th>Rugwerk</th>
<th>Bovenwerk</th>
<th>Pedaal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prestant 16’ II</td>
<td>Prestant 8’ II</td>
<td>Baarpijp 8’</td>
<td>Prestant 16’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Octaaf 8’ II</td>
<td>Holpijp 8’</td>
<td>Quintadeen 8’</td>
<td>Bourdon 16’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roerfluit 8’</td>
<td>Octaaf 4’</td>
<td>Viola de Gamba 8’</td>
<td>Octaaf 8’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Octaaf 4’</td>
<td>Octaaf 2’</td>
<td>Octaaf 4’</td>
<td>Octaaf 4’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quint 3’</td>
<td>Cornet disc. VI</td>
<td>Gemshoorn 4’</td>
<td>Quint 3’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superoctaaf 2’</td>
<td>Mixtuur IV-VIII</td>
<td>Nasard 3’</td>
<td>Mixtuur III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixtuur IV-VIII</td>
<td>Sexqualter II</td>
<td>Nachthoorn 2’</td>
<td>Bazuin 16’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scherp IV-VI</td>
<td>Trompet 8’</td>
<td>Cimbaal III</td>
<td>Trompet 8’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trompet 16’</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sexqualter II-IV</td>
<td>Trompet 4’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trompet 8’</td>
<td></td>
<td>Dulciaan 8’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Vox Humana 8’</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
The Ton Koopman interpretation differs a lot if compared to Germani and Richter. As I wrote, his greatest interest was to play “correctly” from a philological perspective. In order to reach this purpose he adopts a number of expedients.

First of all, he plays on a historical instrument. Then he uses the “Organo Pleno” for the whole piece, few times he changes keyboard because he needs a quieter sound, but always maintaining the mixtures and therefore the typical “pleno” timbre. The choice of the “Organo pleno” seems to be the more philological, because, as I already mentioned, it is indicated in one of the manuscript copies. The same kind of sound, when used on a long piece as the Passacaglia, could turn out to be boring if the sound quality is not excellent; but this is not the case of the Jacobijner kerk organ. The pleno of the Müller organ in fact is rich, brilliant, eminent, full of colours… On an organ like this, the use or not of the same sound is only a matter of stylistic choice, the result is always interesting; on the other hand, when the same sound is used, one could say that it would be a real pity to do not have the opportunity to listen different stops combinations on this classical beauty organ…

Another important stylistic choice in Koopman’s interpretation is the articulation.

Firstly, he never plays legato, except when he ties notes two by two, that is another baroque praxis.
The absence of legato creates as a result, the absence of the cantabile style. In my opinion, this stylistic choice give cause of reflection, especially when investigating on the more authentic performance; J.S. Bach in fact was very devoted to the cantabile style as he wrote in the two and three part inventio frontispiece: “above all, however, to achieve a cantabile style in playing and at the same time acquire a strong foretaste of composition.”

This characteristic of the Koopman style is also more detectable in the fugue. There are different levels of articulation: generally speaking the subject is portato, the first countersubject is staccato or staccatissimo (as every quaver), the second countersubject is staccato or portato or played two by two (as every semiquaver).

Another characteristic of this interpretation is the use of many trills and ornaments even when not written in the score.

Finally, both at the end of the Passacaglia and at the end of the Thema Fugatum, there is not the “classic” ritardando, there is a sort of stringendo instead, which brings to the end with necessity.

6.4 Ottorino Respighi orchestral transcription, conducted by Arturo Toscanini

CD:
Great Conductors · Toscanini: J.S. Bach, Vivaldi, Handel (A. Toscanini with the NBC Symphony Orchestra: Complete concert of November 22, 1947), Naxos 8.110835

Web Link to the recording:
https://open.spotify.com/track/61hSW58iytTnEiZkK4V1go

The transcription for great orchestra was made by Ottorino Respighi in 1930 (opus list P. 159)

Ottorino Respighi (1879 - 1936) was an Italian composer, conductor, musicologist and composition teacher at “Conservatorio di Santa Cecilia” in Roma. His corpus is huge, and he is best known for his symphonic poems (such as “Le fontane di Roma”, “Pini di Roma”, “Feste Romane” etc.), operas (“La fiamma”, “Belfagor” etc.), and a number of composition inspired by ancient music from the XVI, XVII and XVIII century and

20 J. S. Bach - two and three part inventio, BWV 772 - 801
Gregorian chant. Nevertheless he is well known for the Bach Passacaglia orchestral transcription.

The renowned conductor Arturo Toscanini (1867 – 1957) recorded this orchestral transcription on 22\textsuperscript{nd} November 1947 with the NBC symphony orchestra. This orchestra was established specifically for him in 1937, he would lead it for 17 years.

The Respighi – Toscanini duo originated a distinguished interpretation, probably the one where the musical product is the most distant from the original conception of the Bach composition, but not for this reason lacking of sense and artistic value.

It can be considered a romantic interpretation of the Passacaglia for many reasons.

First of all, it is sufficient to listen only the first line to understand the character of the whole interpretation, it contains two characteristics typical of the romantic style: the main subject is presented in fact with great dynamic effect and \textit{tempo rubato}.

The first half of the theme is \textit{Crescendo} and \textit{Accelerando}, the second half \textit{Diminuendo} and \textit{Ritardando}. The ternary subdivision is highlighted with accent on the downbeat and notes played two by two.

Generally speaking, the sonority is quiet until variation number 6, where there is a wide crescendo, then it’s forte until the middle part of the Passacaglia. The group of three variations number 13,14 and 15 are played legato and piano, but from variation number 16 a great sonority is used which gives a dramatic characteristic, this until the contrast with the two last variations (number 19 and 20) in which the pedal point starts very legato and piano that brings to the end with a large crescendo on the last variation, this two variations rise to me the image of the volcanic magma that moves very slowly, then expands and finally inexorably explodes. The fugue is relatively quiet until the Subject in G minor on the bass in which the mood is much more excited. The last subject in C minor on the soprano is much highlighted.

In the last part there is a \textit{rallentando} from the Neapolitan sixth chord to the end.

If I could use some adjectives to describe this interpretation I could say that it is “\textit{concitato con fuoco}” which in English could be “\textit{excited with fire}”, but it is not exactly the same meaning. These adjectives after all, describe the personality of Arturo Toscanini.
6.5 Leopold Stokowsky, orchestral transcription

Web Link to the recording:

1. Passacaglia

https://open.spotify.com/track/5WfUj1NTAvLnKFFUbZE7Rm

2. Thema Fugatum

https://open.spotify.com/track/4EC2oBVbCge763kP6V9LL3?si=u5u0_7haRWCIyuCOA3s4Dw

Leopold Stokowski (1882-1977) is one of the most famous orchestra conductors of the music history, best known to the general public as the conductor who appeared in the Walt Disney Film “Fantasia”. He started his musical career in England as an organist, then he focused in conducting, leading several orchestras through the years, such as the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, the Philadelphia Orchestra, the NBC Symphony Orchestra (from ’41 to ’44, for a controversy between the NBC and Arturo Toscanini), New York Philharmonic Symphony Orchestra, the Houston Symphony Orchestra, the Symphony of the Air (former NBC Symphony orchestra) and many others. Also, he personally founded the All-American Youth Orchestra, the New York City Symphony, the Hollywood Bowl Symphony Orchestra and the American Symphony Orchestra.

Leopold Stokowsky made an orchestral transcription of the Passacaglia and conducted it himself many times, many recordings were made through the Stokowsky career, they are very similar in the general character but each of them has its own peculiarity, depending also on the different orchestra which performed.

I decided to present the one that is the more easily available nowadays. Found in the “Bach-Stokowsky” compact disk by EMI (7243 5 66385 2 5), remastered in 1997 from the original Capitol Records recording(7243 5 66385 2 5), made in February 1958.

This orchestral transcription, originates a romantic piece. I made the same statement regarding the previous Respighi-Toscanini transcription, therefore, it could be thought that the pieces are similar. This is not true, the notes are the same and also the way of using the Bach original score is similar, both Respighi and Stokowsky used almost the original score and assigned the original parts to the orchestra instruments, but, the result is completely different, especially because of the typical way of leading the orchestra, proper of the two conductors.
The Tempo used by Stokowsky is generally very slow, it is rather steady but there are also many “allargando”, especially at the end of some variations, as for example at the end of variation number 7, there is a strong allargando on the last C minor descendent scale which gives gravity both to the scale and to the severity of the next variation, characterised by contrary motion. This happens of course also at the end of the last variation and at the end of the Thema Fugatum, in which the tempo is really “Adagissimo”. This way of managing the tempo, gives to me the impression of “inertia”, not in the negative meaning of “lack of activity or interest, or unwillingness to make an effort to do anything”\(^\text{21}\), but in the physic related meaning, where: “Inertia is the tendency of a body to preserve its state of rest or uniform motion unless acted upon by an external force”\(^\text{22}\); to better explain myself, it seems to me, that the orchestra is very heavy and each tempo changing requires a lot of strength to dissipate or add energy.

The character of this transcription is more “symphonic” thanks to the many orchestral colours used. The “timbre” is full, massive, deep and lyric. This characteristics are given by the orchestration, the Tempo and also by the “free bowing”, in which every string player do not play up-bows and down-bows together but they individually decide themselves the proper way of bowing; the result is a very legato playing and a particular orchestral sound, it was very typical of Stokowsky.

### 6.6 Edward George Power Biggs. Pedal Harpsichord

**LP:**

Bach on the pedal harpsichord, E. Power Biggs, 1966, LP, Columbia masterworks, MS6804

**Web Link to the recording:**

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p01w8MpOkxM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p01w8MpOkxM)

E. G. Power Biggs, (1906 Westcliff-on-sea, UK – 1977 Massachusetts U.S.) was one of the most influential organist of his time in the United States, together with his rival concert organist Virgil Fox. He focused his artistic life on playing and recording Baroque music, such as Bach, Buxtehude, Sweelinck and Pachelbel on historical organs or at least on instruments with classical characteristics, trying to maintain the original style of the interpretation, without any later influence, but of course, with personal taste.

\(^{21}\) Cambridge dictionary. 2018. Cambridge University Press

\(^{22}\) Collins English dictionary 2014. Glasgow. Harper Collins
He was also well-known for his interpretations on the pedal harpsichord, he gave in fact a different sound to a repertoire that belonged (and still belongs) to the organ.

The Bach Passacaglia was probably originally written for harpsichord or clavichord\(^{23}\), so it is very interesting to have an idea of how this incredible piece of music would sound on it.

Until now I analyzed organ and orchestral interpretations, plenty of different colours and dynamical contrasts, at this point, with the memory of different organ stops and orchestral instruments in our memory, it would be hard to imagine an interpretation that can maintain this dynamical characteristics on the harpsichord.

Of course, the sounding result it is very different, but, it is surprising how, also on the harpsichord it is possible to be expressive, making contrasts and giving to each variation its own personality. For some aspects, the differences between the variations are even more highlighted than in other interpretations, Biggs in fact uses musical expedients that make the Passacaglia well suited and interesting also on the harpsichord, an instruments that has fewer dynamical and timbric resources, if compared to the organ or to the orchestra. Without a good interpreter, the Passacaglia on the harpsichord would sound mechanical and flat.

To be more specific, he gives to each variation his own personality by making tempo, articulation, rhythm, and timbre differences. For example, he sometimes uses the \textit{inégale} (variation number 2, 5, 14, 16 and generally a hint of it in the Thema Fugatum). He also uses more ornaments, (for example, more trills in variation number 5 and 9) in the full respect of the harpsichord tradition; in the harpsichord it is common to use many ornaments to obviate to the fast decaying sound. To give an examples of tempo change, I can mention the evident tempo contrast in variation 9 (slow) and 10 (fast), 12 (slow again) and between variation 17 (fast and articulated) and 18 (slow and cantabile); this use of the tempo it gives to me the impression of different kind of dance movements played on the same bass, this is in line with the probable Passacaglia origin as a music for dance.

\(^{23}\) Friederich Konrad Griepenkerl, the already quoted author of one of the Passacaglia manuscript copies, wrote in the introduction to J.S.Bach complete organ works: Actually the six Sonatas and the Passacaglia were written for a clavichord with two manuals and pedal, an instrument that, in those days, every beginning organist possessed, which they used beforehand, to practice playing with hands and feet in order to make effective use of them at the organ. It would be a good thing to let such instruments be made again, because actually no one who wants to study to be an organist can really do without one.

Another characteristic is the use of cadenzas at the end both of the Passacaglia and the Thema Fugatum. The first one is very short and surprisingly made on the D note of the passacaglia theme, before then the VII grade chord resolution on the I grade chord. At the end of the Thema Fugatum instead, the cadenza is longer and obviously made after the suspended cadence chord, after the fermata.

I would say that on the harpsichord, the cadenza assumes more senses then on the organ, probably because is more typical in the harpsichord style or probably because the sound is less massive, so a big breath does not assume the same sense then on the full organ or full orchestra.

7. Conclusions

I am at the end of my work. The passion and the curiosity that I have for the Passacaglia, moved me to investigate, to understand better this marvellous artwork. As I tried to explain, there are tens of recordings and interpretations perspectives, all based upon the same score (sometime with obvious minimal differences, depending on which copy was based the modern transcription, given the lack of original manuscript).

This is the most fascinating concept, after and underneath the interest of the piece itself. The many ways of interpreting this piece is a concept that could be intended as a sort of musical art Manifesto.

Above this concept, it is hidden the fact that the artist, the composer in this case, donate his work, from his inner world to the “outer” world, to artists and broadly to the whole people community. Then, that work, can became an infinite number of other artworks, mediated by the inner word of each of us. It is incredible that the same piece has the power to evocate different thoughts, feelings and emotions to everyone, given by the culture, the country, the family, interests and personal experiences made during the life. Sometime, I lose my mind trying to imagine which kind of thoughts, feelings, and which grade of understanding, other people could have in regard to an artwork, but of course, it is impossible to know and probably, that is the way it should be… I made this reflection because very often I astonish myself to have different inner thoughts each time that I listen to the same piece. This happened many time with the Passacaglia, especially after this research. The reason were that, firstly, I had a better understanding of the piece, from various angles, moreover, during the research, I, as a human being, inevitably made experiences that changed myself to some extent, so, my relationship with the piece has changed and finally also my way of playing it.
I personally think that, few points make the playing of a piece a real interpretation:

Firstly: a thoughtful understanding of how the piece is written, given by an analysis, which starts from the general structure, then using an increasingly powerful magnifying glass to come to the single notes, from an harmonic, contrapuntal and philological point of view. Secondly: the listening and the study of renowned artist’s interpretation.

Finally: mediating the piece through personal sensibility.

None of this point can stands alone, in fact, mediate with sensibility without having knowledge of the piece, originates a way of playing that has no awareness of the facts, and vice versa, having an only-analytical point of view, might originate a rational but distant way of playing. Moreover, the study of previous great interpretations helps us to widen the perspective, because great interpreters always have a both rational and personal approach.

Ultimately, my research helped me to better understand the Passacaglia, the rhetorical analysis has contributed to make me understand the character of the parts the piece is composed of, this, as a result, has changed at some points my own interpretation, which is now more respectful of the nature of each variation and therefore more varied if compared to the earlier. Moreover, this research taught me how to deal with the repertoire in a thoughtful way, in order to try to create real personal interpretations, which could add value to the performing arts world.

I wish to myself, and to every musician, to apply this attitude, at least, towards the most important part of the repertoire; only in this way the music can be maintained alive, because it is the intangible art for antonomasia that exists only when it is performed.

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