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Classical Rhetoric in Baroque Music

CLASSICAL RHETORIC AND BAROQUE MUSIC

PREFACE

The aim of this paper is to show that rhetoric, in the way the ancient Greeks and the Romans had conceived it, was an important tool in composing as well as interpreting baroque music. The rediscovery of classical culture, after the partial but very substantial oblivion during the Medieval time, started in the XIV century in Italy, where it culminated in the VX and the XVI century, and in this later phase it spread in Europe. In the ancient world, rhetoric was the art of making a speech, usually in public, often in law-courts or assemblies. It was the mark of a civilized society with freedom of expression and democratic laws. It represented the power and the dignity of the word. This is why in the civilized world of the Renaissance it acquires once more great importance. In the same period, around the XVI century, music is considered more and more an art with the same dignity of poetry and prose, and with the same rhetorical devices that are found in the ancient treatises on languages and speeches. The parallel between music and languages is strengthened by the birth in Italy, towards the end of the XVI century, of the new musical style called "Seconda pratica". According to this style, music must express all sort of feelings and passions in order to move the audience. The study of the musical "rhetorical figures" used in this style can be a valid help for the modern performer to approach this kind of baroque repertoire. The discussion on rhetoric and music continues and develops in Germany with theoreticians like Mattheson and composers like Bach, who apply to

musical compositions the same roles of how to articulate a speech as they are found in Cicero and Quintilian.

Thanks to my back-ground in the field of ancient Greek and Latin literature (I own a doctorate in classical philology) and my professional experience as a harpsichord player, I have become interested in this aspect of music-theory and I have given lectures and concerts on this subject - sometimes together with my husband recorder player Dan Laurin - in several conservatories and courses in Europe. Above all I have tried to analyze and investigate how the knowledge in this field can help to orientate historically informed performance-practice. Because, ultimately, the goal for such a research for musicians like me is not to limit the discussion to some isolated analysis, but to be able to apply practically this knowledge to our way of performing.

Anna Paradiso Laurin, Bromma 2012

PREAMBULUM

Rhetoric is the art or the discipline that deals with the use of discourse, either spoken or written, to inform or persuade or motivate an audience, whether that audience is made up of one person or a group of person. Broadly defined in that way, rhetoric would seem to comprehend every kind of verbal expression that people engage in. But rhetoric has traditionally been concerned with those instances of formal, premeditated, sustained monologue in which a person seeks to exert an effect on an audience. This notion of "an effect on an audience" gets at the very essence of rhetorical discourse. The classical rhetoricians seem to have narrowed the particular effect of rhetorical discourse to persuasion. Aristotle, for instance, defined rhetoric as "the faculty of discovering all the available means of persuasion in any given situation". But when one is reminded that the Greek word for persuasion derives from the Greek verb "to believe" one sees that Aristotle's definition can be made to comprehend not only those modes of discourse that are "argumentative" but also those "expository" modes of discourse that seek to win acceptance of information or explanation. But whether we are seeking "to enlighten the understanding, to please the imagination, to move the passions, or to influence the will, "we must adopt and adapt those strategies that will best achieve our end. *Strategies* is a good rhetorical word, because it implies the *choice* of available resources to achieve an end. It is no accident that the word *strategy* has military associations, for this word has its roots in the Greek word for *army*. Just as a general will adopt those resources, those tactics, which are most likely to defeat the enemy in a battle, so the marshaller of

language will seek out and use the best argument, and the best style to "win" an audience.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

RHETORIC AND THE ANCIENT WORLD

For the birth of rhetoric it is possible to establish a precise place and a precise time. In 467 b.C. the long domination of the tyrants Gelon and Geron in the Greek city of Syracuse (Sicily) came to an end. Since this had been a period of numerous expropriations, many citizens brought charges in order to get back their confiscated properties, and they did it in court, armed with words. In this context, it seems that the first one to give lessons about eloquence was the philosopher Empedocles from another Greek city, Agrigentum. He was immediately imitated by his Syracusan pupils Corax and Tisias, who wrote the first manuals of rhetoric and who were payed for their teaching.

However, Cicero asserts that rhetoric was known in Sicily well before Corax and Tisias; so we can assume that their merit lies in having theorized with a scientific method a practice that had existed for centuries. According to what Plato tells us, the core issue of their art is the concept of «verisimile» (*eikós*), i.e. everything that cannot be considered "true" or "false" in absolute terms, which they made object of a rigorous and scientific method. Although these theories of a "scientific" rhetoric became very popular in Sicily, an opposite current of "irrational" rhetoric emerged inside the Pythagorean school, based on the seduction that the word exercises on the soul (*psicagogia*). The Pythagoreans distinguished the arguments according to the type of audience and made large use of antithesis. They also theorized for the

first time the *kairós* (the right or opportune moment), a concept which indicated numeric harmony and was strictly connected to *polytropía* (the degree of appropriateness of a speech in relation to the audience one has).

During the V century b.C., from *Magna Graecia* (the part of South Italy colonized by the Greeks) rhetoric reached rapidly Greece, especially in Athens, thanks to the activity of the Sophists. The V century is called the "golden age" of Athens, ruled by Pericles, the man who boasted the superiority of Athens ("we are beautiful and good"), a city based on a democratic system (first case in the world). Every single (male) citizen of Athens was given the opportunity to sit in the public assembly of the government for one day every year. So many young boys who could afford to pay came from all over to listen to intellectuals such as Protagoras, Gorgias, Prodicus, etc., called "Sophists" : these "teachers of virtues", taught them how to hold a proper speech in public assemblies. It is always in periods of enlightenment, cultural development and freedom of thought that words assume a fundamental role. And rhetoric is the art of shaping the words and creating a precise relation and precise goals between the speaker and the audience. The word for the Athenians was the symbol of freedom and ability: those who could talk, would convince and get it their own way, therefore gaining authority and power. But beyond this, they were a civilization that believed in the power of dialogue, and in the sacred moment when the speaker meets his audience. I think it is interesting to underline this point because we will see, later on, that the same magic moment for the power of the words will return two times more after the V century, in ancient Rome first, and then again in Italy with the humanism in the XIII and XIV century, a cultural

current this one that will eventually influence also the field of musical theory and practice.

With the Sophists rhetoric is not only a tool for law courts and assemblies but it assumes also an independent, epideictic role for ceremonies, commemorations or even just as an exercise of ability to show off one's wit. In this way, with intellectuals like Protagoras, rhetoric enters the domain of ethic and epistemological relativism. "Man is measure of everything" is Protagoras' famous precept: by mastering the roles and tools of rhetoric, one can demonstrate, using two antithetic speeches (called in Greek *dissòì lógoi*), that any object of the discussion is true or otherwise false. This brings to the extreme consequence of considering rhetoric as a form of suggestion, a fascination totally separated from a need of reaching some kind of knowledge or conviction based on rational reasoning and rational proves. The power of persuasion of the word brings Gorgias to say that "the word (*logos* in Greek) is omnipotent over men and gods" because through the word one can convince anybody about anything and let them believe that he posses the truth. Of course this way of connecting rhetoric and likelihood attracted violent critics in Greece from those who believed that this concepts were immoral and underhand.

However, a merit of the Sophists was that they refined the art of rhetoric, with detailed methods – they are lost now but we have second-hand informations about it – on style and roles. Particularly important for us in this context is that Gorgias introduced for the first time the so called "rhetorical figures", that is, devices of different kinds in the speech aimed at creating a particular "effect". We will linger on this argument in a while.

In the IV century the renowned philosopher Plato opposed to the sophistic conception his own vision on

rhetoric, which in his opinion was not an art but an "ability" with a specific pedagogical function. Rhetoric, according to Plato, could guide the soul through reasoning and argumentations towards the good, if used by philosophers. Thus rhetoric became a dependent branch of philosophy and a direct mean to reach the "absolute truth", the constant goal of the whole philosophical work of Plato - quite another planet than the Sophistic one.

With Aristotle, unlike Plato, rhetoric reconquered the independent role of a science, defining it as "the faculty of discovering the possible method of persuasion for each object". He focussed his attention on the means of persuasion rather than on the object itself. For Aristotle rhetoric is strictly connected to dialectic and logic but, unlike these two sciences, rhetoric is based on *probable* premises and therefore also its conclusions are only probable and thus subject to possible confutation. Object of the rhetoric is not the "absolute truth" but the "plausible". Among many other issues, Aristotle deals with the role of the passions (*pathos*) and their importance in persuading someone. Even more important for our purpose, as we will see further on in this paper, is that Aristotle concludes his important work "Rhetoric" with an analysis of the different sections that a speech must have: an introduction; a narration of the main facts; a further demonstration of the stated facts by means of a list of argumentations supportive of the main thesis, and a confutation of the possible objections; a conclusion which must predispose in a favorable way the listener, reinforce the thesis, provoke emotional reactions and summarize all arguments.

In 168 b.C. the Romans gained control on Greece and became profoundly affected by all aspects of the Greek culture, rhetoric included. Also the Roman political

system of that period included a large assembly (*senatus*) where the power of speech was fundamental to establish one or the other political current. Towards the end of the republican era, in the I cent. b.C., the famous lawyer and intellectual Cicero gave a sublime example of rhetorical refinement in his numerous written speeches to be recited in court, permeated of the political feuds of the period. He also wrote theoretic philosophical works on rhetoric, with a strong philosophical approach. It is interesting for the purposes of the present paper to recall the distinction Cicero makes of the different phases necessary to compose a rhetorical speech: *inventio*, the discovery of the arguments that the speaker will use in his speech; *dispositio*, the order of appearance of the arguments; *elocutio*, the devices (rhetorical figures) he will use to ornate the speech and give it effectiveness by arousing emotions in the listener; *actio*, the delivery that is given to a speech (tone of the voice, hands gestures, emotional engagement, etc.).

With the passage from the republic to the empire, rhetoric lost its political importance in Rome, even if it remained part of the education of the young men. However, it was in this period that one of the most important works on rhetoric for the Western culture was written: the *Institutio Oratoria* by Quintilianus (I cent. a.C.). In his *Institutio* Quintilianus theorized the educational path that a young man must follow in order to become a good rhetorician. In fact only through the study of rhetoric, by becoming a *vir bonus dicendi peritus* (a good man skilled in the art of speaking), a student can become an honest and morally steady citizen. Besides the pedagogical aspects, Quintilian analyzes also many technical issues, such as the five phases of composition (*inventio, dispositio, elocutio, memoria,*

actio) that Cicero had already mentioned. Following Aristotle's wake (he probably read only a summary of the "Rhetoric" reported from some later Greek author) he wrote on the different parts of a speech. As we will see, for reasons that we will analyze in the present paper, this very part of Quintilian's work will become very popular among musicologists and composers in XVIII century Germany.

RHETORIC IN ITALY DURING RENAISSANCE HUMANISM

At the end of the XIII century Italy became the center of an intellectual renewal aiming at reversing all the old Medieval ideas, such as the one of a hierarchic world with a dominating God and a submissive humanity. The reason why these new intellectuals, writers philosophers and politicians, are called "humanists" is because they put the humans, men and women, in the center, with their total freedom and dignity of building up their own world by means of their intelligence, creativity and independence. The climax of this movement, which became a fundamental step in the development of Western culture, was in Italy during the XV and XVI century, but very soon also Northern Europe was overwhelmed by the new ideas. One of the main concept of the humanists is that men, and also women, should get an education in literature, philosophy and also rhetoric to refine and elevate their souls as responsible citizens. The moral aspect of the educations involves also rhetoric: again, as we have seen for the ancient times, in a society that regards freedom and individual dignity as important values, the art of speaking becomes vital for a proper social life. After centuries of oblivion, the intellectuals of this period rediscover the classical culture of the Greeks and the Romans as a symbol of the highest expression of civilization for

the Western culture. In fact they believe it is essential to rediscover, study and imitate the ancient authors of all sort of disciplines in order to build up a highly civilized society. Especially between the XV and the XVI century the Italian humanists go hunting and rediscover many major works of the antiquity that had been copied and then forgotten in the European monasteries. In particular, 1416 is an important date because the humanist Poggio Bracciolini finds the *Institutio Oratoria* in the abbey of Saint Gall in Switzerland.

RHETORICAL FIGURES

As we have seen, one of the main aspects of a rhetorically effective speech is to disseminate it with something that I might call "formulas", groups of words which bear an extra-meaning because of the way they are put together and that arouse emotions in the audience. We can divide most of these figures in three main groups: figures of repetition, figures of contradiction, figures of silence. I will now explain in depth the most common rhetorical figures. A more complete list of them (in connection to their use in music) is offered in the *appendix* at the end of this paper. Most of these figures carry ancient Greek or Latin names even in modern languages because of the huge influence of classical rhetoric in this field.

FIGURES OF REPETITION

This kind of figures requires the repetition of a single word or of a group of words again and again in a discourse, like in the figure called "anaphora". In many cases the repetition signifies a progressive intensification of an idea or a feeling, therefore

conveying an emotional response. For instance, in the sentence "I know, I know, I know what you mean!", I repeat the expression "I know" to stress my awareness. It is usual that the tone of the voice will become more and more intense. As we have seen, the way things are said in rhetorical terms is called *actio*: by decoding a rhetorical figure – like in the above-mentioned example, by identifying an anaphora in the repetition of "I know" – it is possible to define the proper *actio*. The choice of a certain kind of rhetorical figure competes, as we know, to the realm of *elocutio*. Seen from another perspective, by establishing what kind of *actio* is required for a certain context, it is possible for the speaker to find the appropriate rhetorical figure. On the other side, the *actio* can influence the emotional content of a rhetorical figure in a way or another. An anaphora, for example, can also express a decrease of tension, serving for instance the purpose of creating a doubt. The sentence "I am happy today ... I am happy ... today ... I am ... happy ... today", if pronounced slower and slower and with an increasing interrogative tone, conveys a clear sense of confusion and doubt: am I really happy today? But pronounced faster and faster, and more and more nervously, it can express a feeling of anger or desperation instead.

Another common figure of repetition is the *climax*, which carries always a feeling of increasing tension. In this case, we can have either a group of words said with an increasingly higher tone of voice, or an idea presented with different expressions, each of them conveying the message with more intensity. An example could be the following sentence: "you are dear to me, you are the dearest thing really, you are the only meaning of my life, you are God to me!". The speaker could at this point decide to talk faster and faster,

to stress the excitement, or slower and slower, as to underline the weight of the words. The opposite case is called *anticlimax*, that is, repeated words in a decreasingly lower tone, or an idea expressed with less and less intensity.

FIGURES OF SILENCE

This category includes some figures that are connected to an important goal of the rhetorical composition: to keep always the audience's attention and to be able to surprise it at times. Thus silence in this context means an unexpected break or pause in the flow, like in the *abruptio*. In the middle of a speech, a sudden pause can create surprise in the audience, and maybe shake some sleepy listeners... Another figure of silence is the *suspiratio*, that breaks a phrase like in a sigh.

FIGURES OF CONTRADICTION

Another goal of rhetoric is to to make the composition various in style by adding some further "special effect". Contradiction in style makes the discourse more dynamic and witty. A typical example is the *antitheton*: it proves an idea by building it on contraries. Here it is an example from R. Sherry: "Flattery hath pleasant beginnings, but the same hath very bitter endings". A similar figure is the antithesis, based on the juxtaposition of contrasting words or ideas: "It has been my experience that folks who have no vices have very few virtues" (A, Lincoln). Another figure of this category is the so called *non sequitur*, a statement that bears no relationship to the context proceeding, often absurd to the point of bearing humorous effects. If the speaker is very open and bold in his speech, he is making use of *parrhesia*,

a kind of figure that uses strong expressions, maybe even unpleasant.

A LANGUAGE WITHOUT WORDS: MUSIC IN XVI CENTURY ITALY

Compared to the performance of romantic and modern music, where the composer writes in detail the way he wants his music to be delivered, by adding signs of dynamic, tempo, character, etc., the performance of baroque music relies mainly on a series of conventions which were understood at the time and not needed to be written in. At the same time, often we see that romantic composers like for instance Chopin and Schumann indicated explicitly very precise connections between the piece they were composing and a particular moment of their lives or a particular thought or feeling. The baroque composers, on the other side, don't do it, apart from some exceptions, and leave to us the task of decoding the one character or the many characters of their compositions. Some insist on the fact that baroque music aims at presenting "theatrical characters" and at conveying "*descriptions of passions*" rather than expressing direct feelings. I don't agree with this view, which is, by the way, quite popular among some famous baroque interpreters. I believe baroque music can deal with "real", "personal" feelings as much as any other form of art. Only, as I said before, it does it relying upon a series of codes which are often not so familiar for the modern interpreter. I am thinking for instance of how to recognize different articulations, the dynamic (which is rarely indicated), some rhythmical patterns, how to establish the tempo of a piece and how to make a rubato, all issues that usually are not explicitly mentioned by the composer and that one has to understand by studying the original sources that deal

with these arguments. One of these "codes" is rhetoric, musical rhetoric in this case, which derives directly from the rhetorical classical tradition applied to languages which we have shortly analyzed before. At some stage in the process of making music, theoreticians and composers assimilated the belief that since music is a language, it must be consciously treated as such. In the beginning, on a theoretical level, this happened – as many other things we are dealing with in this paper – in Italy and then was accepted, developed and systematized in other countries, especially in Germany (Germans are often better than Italians in this latter respect!). The Italian sources on the argument are all from the second half of the XVI century and the beginning of the following one. Most of the theoreticians limit their reflections on a general level, without going into details, but some of them embark on a deeper discussion about how the language can influence a musical composition. The reasons behind the parallel between music and rhetoric are manifold. During the XVI the music was seen first of all as a way to move the audience (*movere* in Latin), and then also to please (*delectare*) and even stupefy. This because, as we have seen, in this period the interest for the ancient Greek culture had become very strong and Greek music, as well as the way the Greeks felt about music, was considered worth imitating. The Greeks thought that music could profoundly move the human soul (till the point that Plato believes that certain kinds of harmonies and melodies are too upsetting for young people and should be banished from his ideal state...). They had built up a whole system of how different musics affect the soul in different ways. In the renaissance and baroque period, people believed the same. So, in order to move, music must follow the

same roles as languages, exploiting the same "rhetorical figures" as a language does, that is, the same way of conveying "special emotional messages" to the audience through a special choice of words, - or notes, in the case of music. We will see soon how this is done but first I want to stress that in the beginning the only music theoreticians and composers were thinking about was vocal music and absolutely not instrumental music. The latter one, in fact, was used for centuries only in form of dances and in any case as pure, light entertainment without any other meaning.

Among the authors who talk about the connection between vocal music and rhetoric, we find Vincenzo Galilei (father of the famous Galileo) who, in his *Dialogo della musica antica et moderna* (1581) writes that composers and performers of the modern style should find inspiration for their work in the theatrical pieces. They should try to imitate the different characters played on the scene, with all their peculiarities according to the different roles. He refers in particular to the imitation of "quantity of sound", "types of accents", "the speed in speaking", *i.e.* agogic, dynamic, phrasing and accentuation, all elements that we do not find explicitly written in baroque music. Vicentino in *L'antica musica ridotta alla moderna prattica* (1555) writes: "... and the experience of the rhetorician teaches that he sometimes talks loud, and sometimes soft, and now slower, now faster, and in this way he moves the audience a lot ... and for this reason one will think of music as an imitation of the accents, and the effects of the parts of a speech. And what effect would provoke a speaker who wouldn't recite a speech without the right accents, and the right pronunciation, now slow now fast, now speaking loud,

now soft to move the audience...". Thus music imitates words by means of the *actio*.

One of the main reasons behind the introduction of a discussion on rhetoric in vocal music was, as I see it, to stress the dignity of this genre, not inferior to poetry nor theater. Music should not limit its role to accompany dance or to entertain. It should go beyond nice madrigals which contained fine counterpoints and polyphony but no real connection to the sung text, no real "emotions". Music should finally bring something new and stupefying for the audiences, something full of passions and stories and human experiences! Exactly like the Greeks had done with their tragedies... This should be music bearing a *meaning*, a story, above anything else, music able to move, involve and elevate the souls. The Italian vocal music of *seconda pratica* (or *prattica*) was conceived exactly in this atmosphere of renewal, as a natural result of that process that, as we've seen, started in the XIV century and had brought the human being at the center of the universe. The old style of thought, the *prima pratica*, was represented by counterpoint, a way of arranging the world according to rational hierarchic roles, totally passionate- less and fully controllable. Another typical expression of the old style was the polyphonic composition of the madrigal: the intersection of the voices, however beautiful, could not possibly stress the meaning of each sentence that was sung. In order to do it, according to the supporters of *seconda pratica*, music must recreate the same rhetorical figures of language in musical terms, in order to adhere completely to the sung text. The new style is a world where human feelings are expressed in all their depth (what in baroque Italian was called "*affetti*"), by introducing a new genre, where there is a single voice only together with the *basso continuo*, a way of

accompanying the voice, on an harpsichord or a lute, much more flexible to the different nuances of the text. The ideal form for this new style is the *recitativo*, where the soloist is not bound to any measure or tempo and can freely follow the rhythm of the words and, above all, the inner rhythm of the feelings expressed in it, by accelerating, stopping, sighing, etc. - of course followed as a shadow by the accompanist/s. Thus the sung *opera* is the most complex achievement of *seconda pratica*.

SECONDA PRATICA

The expression *seconda pratica* was introduced for the first time by the great composer of vocal music Claudio Monteverdi in his *Avvertimenti* to the V book of *Madrigali* (1605), as a response to some harsh critics against his music made by a theoretician named Artusi in a work called "*Delle imperfettioni della musica moderna* (1600). Already in 1558, the famous theoretician Gioseffo Zarlino had stated in *Le istituzioni armoniche* that the *affetti* contained in the text must inspire the music that accompanies it.

All

aspects of the musical material can be used in an "*affettuoso way*", that is, to create emotional expressions according to the different meanings of the text. For instance, according to Zarlino, by using strange intervals (at that time for example a major sixth or a seventh were considered quite adventurous) or accidentals one can express pain or surprise. Also, he says, rhythm can be used according to the needs of the text. If Zarlino was quite conservative in how the music should be "altered" in an emotional way, Monteverdi had gone beyond any role that the counterpoint had established in the past, in order to bring the theory of *affetti* to its full consequences.

If in the old manner of composing it was important to prepare a dissonance, Monteverdi introduces intervals which are "so absolute and naked" to arouse Artusi's disconcert. But Monteverdi was firmly convinced that "signora dell'armonia è l'orazione": words dominate music. Extreme dissonances in music are as necessary as surprise and *pathos* in poetry. When the meaning of the text requires it, music must express harsh feelings, passions, desperate love, etc. and the only way of doing it is by using the same rhetorical devices of languages. As Athanasius Kircher will say fifty years later "Rhetoric can delight the soul, or make it sad, then it moves it toward anger, then towards commiseration, then indignation, then revenge, and violent passions and other feelings; after it has reached emotional turmoil, eventually it leads the listener to be persuaded of what the speaker says. In the same way, music, combining in various ways periods and sounds, moves the soul with various results". The musical rhetorical figures are formulas that the composers of *seconda pratica* used to express the *affetti* of the text sung and correspond to the rhetorical figures used in languages, only of course, they are made of notes instead of words. The knowledge of such figures is quite essential to the understanding and performance of this music. They represented well known conventions for the contemporaries – who were imbued in classical culture immensely more than we usually are today and therefore there was no need of explaining them. Sometimes when I give lectures on this argument I am asked by some students what's the need of remembering all those weird, exotic words. Of course this is not necessary to play this music well. But to rely completely on our own "intuition" and "musicality" as modern performers is for most of us not enough in order to perform this music in the way

it deserves. This is true also because we modern performers and scholars are often far from that familiarity that baroque composers had with the Latin and the Greek culture.

ORNAMENT *i.e.* ELOCUTIO

It is plausible to say that the passage from the renaissance period to the baroque era marks a shift from the interest in the structure, in the *dispositio*, *i.e.* in the counterpoint and the rigorous leading of the voices, to the focus on the *elocutio*, the rhetorical ornament, which is everything that counts for *seconda pratica*. Someone might argue that this means more superficiality and futility of form. If we step back to the ancient discussion about the fundamental division between *what* is communicated through language and *how* this is communicated, we see that Aristotle phrased this as the difference between *logos* (the logical content of a speech) and *lexis* (the style and delivery of a speech). Roman authors such as Quintilian would make the same distinction by dividing consideration of things or substance, *res*, from consideration of verbal expression, *verba*. But ultimately the divide between form and content is always an artificial and conditional one, since ultimately attempting to make this division reveals the fundamentally indivisible nature of verbal expression and ideas. An example is found if one attempts at performing translations as rhetorical exercises. Most probably it will turn out that it is impossible to completely capture the meaning and effect of a thought expressed in any terms other than its original words. This division is based on a view of language as something more than simply a mechanistic device for transcribing or delivering thought. With the sophists of ancient

Greece rhetoricians have shared a profound respect for how language affects not just audiences, but thought processes. One way to understand the overlapping nature of *logos* and *lexis*, *res* and *verba*, invention and style, is through the word "ornament". To our modern sensibilities this suggests a superficial, inessential decoration—something that might be pleasing but which is not truly necessary. The etymology of this word is *ornare*, a Latin verb meaning "to equip". The ornaments of war, for example, are weapons and soldiers. The ornaments of rhetoric are not extraneous; they are the equipment required to achieve the intended meaning or effect. I believe this can be an illuminating way of grasping the function of "ornamentation" in Italian baroque music.

MUSICAL RHETORICAL FIGURES: EXAMPLES OF PERFORMANCE PRACTICE

We will now analyze some examples of musical rhetorical figures, how it is possible to identify them and how they can influence the performance practice. Also in music rhetorical figures can be divided into the three main groups we have named for figures in language: figures of repetition, of silence, and of contradiction. Also in this case it is possible to find other figures beyond the above-mentioned distinction. The purposes and the effects are exactly the same as in linguistic rhetoric but of course these figures are made of notes. Let's consider some of the types that we have analyzed in the three different categories, in addition to few more. The presence in a piece of a repeated group of notes can have most probably the same rhetorical meaning as seen in the *anaphora*, the *climax* and the *anticlimax*. The difference between *anaphora* and *climax* is that

whereas the first occurs in the same register, the *climax* is the repetition of a pattern in different registers, progressively higher in the *climax*, lower the *anticlimax*. How to stress these rhetorical devices in the performance and what's the musical meaning of them? Well, as we saw, repetition can mean intensification of an idea. In this case the performer might choose to express the figure by means of anagogic interpretation, accelerating in the repetition of the pattern. From a dynamic point of view, one might opt for a *crescendo*. The beginning of Frescobaldi's Toccata I from Libro Primo in my opinion applies to this case. But in other contexts the repetition might suggest to the performer that that lingering on the same idea is insinuating a doubt in the musical flow. In this case it will be more proper to decelerate and to do a *diminuendo*. This case can be justified for instance if following to the *anaphora* we find a sudden change in the rhythm, as to break what was said before. A *climax* can require an acceleration as well. However, going higher and higher might also express a sense of fatigue, which requires to slow down along the way up. It is up to the interpreter, depending on what comes before and after and for the sake of variety, to decide whether to do a *crescendo* or a *diminuendo*, or both. In the same way an *anticlimax* can correspond to a deceleration, as losing the strength, or otherwise it can allude to a "precipitation", a fall down. After having identified a certain kind of rhetorical figure, it is then the performer's responsibility to establish the specific nuance of that figure in the context.

Similar to the *climax* and the *anticlimax* are two rhetorical figures that we find only in music: *anabasis* and *katabasis*. They also involve an up-words or down-words movement, with the same kind of values seen for *climax* and *anticlimax*. The only difference is

that they consist in up-words (*anabasis*) or down-words (*katabasis*) scales. A particular kind of *katabasis* is mentioned by Caccini in his "Nuove musiche", and therefore called "cascata cacciniana". With no doubt it must be played with a huge acceleration down-words. I have been talking about dynamical choices depending on the rhetorical message carried by a figure, however, if the instrument used is a harpsichord, the dynamic element will be substituted by other typical harpsichord expressive means such as, as we have seen, agogic and also touch. Personally I believe that the alternation of a more *legato* touch with a more detached one can help in underlining the dramatic value of a rhetorical figure. For example, one might choose in a *climax* to play more and more *legato*, or more and more detached. Or else in an *anaphora* one could start with more *legato*, gradually shifting towards a more detached touch, and then ending with a more *legato* again. There are not general roles but we know from original sources, such as Francois Couperin, that touch on the harpsichord is an important expressive tool.

In baroque music we find often sudden pauses to create surprise or a strong dramatic effect, as in the *aposiopesis*. Pauses can occur in the middle of a phrase or sometimes at the beginning of a new one, as to underline a dramatic change. When the performer individuates such a pause, he or she will be able to stress its rhetorical meaning by taking more time before and after it. In the *tmesis* the break consists in a pause between two contiguous phrases. An other kind of silence is the unexpected omission of a consonance or of a conclusion (*ellipsis*). Also in this case it is possible to express the rhetorical value by altering the dynamic, the agogic and also, in the harpsichord, by using an expressive touch, such as the

one suggested by Couperin in the ornament that he calls *aspiration* (gently lifting a note before the end of its value), or *suspension* (the other way around). The same technique is appropriate when playing a *suspiratio* (breaking of phrase that imitates a sigh). A typical figure of contradiction is the *anthiteton*, i.e. the juxtaposition of opposite meanings (in counterpoint, rhythm, harmonies). Since a "contradiction" involves a dramatic brake in the musical flow, even in similar context it is required that the performer works on the expressive effect of dynamic, agogic, rubato, touch., i.e. the whole equipment of the *actio*. The last figure I wish to describe is the above-mentioned *parrhesia*, a very important expressive tool in music. It concerns notes outside the key of the piece, unexpected dissonances, that convey a sense of discomfort and pain, or surprise. A chromatic succession of dissonances is called *passus duriusculus* (from Latin: a hard passage); a dissonant jump is called *saltus duriusculus*. It is obvious that encountering these figures the performer should stress the oddity by lingering on the passage with a rubato and stress it with dynamic expressivity.

GIROLAMO ALESSANDRO FRESCOBALDI AND THE RHETORICAL KEY-BOARD

Organist in Rome for most of his life (he was born in 1583 and died in 1643), Frescobaldi is one of the greatest keyboard composers of all times. His fame started during his life-time and has continued basically non stop till our days, as shown by numerous handwritten copies of his works throughout the centuries. Composers of all ages rendered homage to him but Frescobaldi has two faces, and it was mainly his impeccable contrapuntal style

that made him appreciated by composers like Bach. However, the innovative, powerful genius of this man appears to me in the other part of his work, which can be considered a written version of his renowned and astonishing improvisations. His toccatas from his *Primo Libro* of compositions belong to this category. They are composed in the *stylus phantasticus* (free collage-technique with strong contrasts) and they are expressions of that same *seconda prattica* full of *affetti* promoted by Monteverdi. But Frescobaldi, for the first time, assigns to instrumental music the same role as vocal music: even notes without words can bear a meaning, a story to tell, to move, to amaze! This can be done by using the same musical formulas, that is, the same rhetorical devices and ornaments, used in vocal music: repetitions to emphasize a concept, sudden breaks to create suspense, jumps and sighs, strange harmonies to express pain or wonder... So again it is important to be familiar with rhetorics and Italian vocal ornaments to play this music. In particular, Giulio Caccini, another follower of *seconda prattica*, in his *Nuove musiche* (1602) gives some interesting examples of some of these ornaments and formulas that we find also in Frescobaldi. Also in this kind of music, the ornament, i.e., the feelings, the way things are said, becomes a structural part of the composition, is the composition itself. Frescobaldi's toccatas are the essence of the Italian baroque esthetic: lights, shadows, theatrical gestures that break a mood, harmonic proportions that are distorted into unexpected shapes, rich contrasts. This music is for me like a Caravaggio painting, where religious devotion and celestial beatitudes are expressed with realistic - often even violent - vitality, rather than by means of contemplative meditation. I wonder if these two supreme geniuses ever met in the streets of Rome ...

DOUBTING RHETORIC

At this point of our discussion one thing needs to be mentioned: no one of the Italian sources from 1500-1600 dealing with the relation between music and rhetoric refers to the expression "rhetorical figure". Moreover, in these sources - Monteverdi included - we find no more than few references to some of these musical figures I have been describing. Why then stressing the importance of something that Italian theoreticians and composers didn't seem to bother about? Why cataloguing all rhetorical figures, giving them names, discussing their influence on performance of Italian music from 1600? Well, to start with an answer that doesn't appear less paradoxical, all these figures were catalogued many years later, and not even in Italy, but in Germany, by authors such as J.N. Forkel (in "Allgemeine Geschichte der Musik", 1788-1801) and G. Bernhard. They put them in explicit relation to Italian music from 1600 and give practical examples from musical works. However suspicious this might seem to some, it has been shown by eminent scholars and performers such as harpsichord player and scholar Emilia Fadini that the reason why the Italians didn't explicitly mention the rhetorical figures is simply this, that they did not bother to do it because they considered them such an intrinsic part of the way of composing and thinking of musicians and listeners alike, that it was not necessary to write it down. Later on, while studying and admiring Italian baroque music, the Germans felt the need to systematize that world.

Besides these explanation, I believe that the strong presence of rhetoric in Monteverdi, Frescobaldi and many other composers of the period - actually also outside Italy - is so clear that it doesn't need

further confirmation. And I am referring not only to the micro- level of rhetorical figures - which is the only aspect I have limited myself to discuss in this paper in reference to this music - but also on the macro-level of *dispositio*.

MATTHESON'S "MUSIK ALS KLANGREDE": THE RHETORICAL PATH TOWARDS BACH

References about the parallel between words and music - in rather vague terms - appear in Germany already in some sources from 1500, such as in Gallus Dressler. However, the German theoretic and practical contribution went well beyond a classification of rhetorical figures, especially in the work of Johan Mattheson "Der vollkommene Kapellmeister" (1739). This book, as it has been proved, had an enormous impact especially on J. S. Bach's music. Mattheson knew very well the works of Quintilian as well as the treatise *Rhetorica ad Herennium* and declared that a musical composition must follow the same *dispositio* as stated in the Latin sources. The sessions must be the following: *exordium*, *narratio*, *probatio*, *confutatio*, *peroratio*. This kind of concept is already present, to different extent, in musical compositions from previous periods and different countries but it seems that the Germans, and in particular Bach, were the first ones to follow it in the exact way Quintilian had suggest. I will now analyze and comment each of these sessions as described in Quintilian.

INTRODUCTION (EXORDIUM)

From Quintilian (book IV, ch.1): "*The commencement or exordium as we call it in Latin is styled a proem by the Greeks. This seems to me a more appropriate name, because whereas we merely indicate that we are*

beginning our task, they clearly show that this portion is designed as an introduction to the subject on which the orator has to speak. It may be because προοίμιον means a tune, and players on the lyre have given the name of proem to the prelude which they perform to win the favor of the audience before entering upon the regular contest for the prize, that orators before beginning to plead make a few introductory remarks to win the indulgence of the judges. Or it may be because προοίμιον in Greek means a way, that the practice has arisen of calling an introduction a proem. But in any case there can be no doubt that by proem we mean the portion of a speech addressed to the judge before he has begun to consider the actual case. And it is a mistaken practice which we adopt in the schools of always assuming in our exordia that the judge is already acquainted with the case..." "The sole purpose of the exordium is to prepare our audience in such a way that they will be disposed to lend a ready ear to the rest of our speech. The majority of authors agree that this is best effected in three ways, by making the audience well-disposed, attentive and ready to receive instruction. I need hardly say that these aims have to be kept in view throughout the whole speech, but they are especially necessary at the commencement, when we gain admission to the mind of the judge in order to penetrate still further".

Etymologically, introduction means "a leading into". The Greek and Latin rhetorical terms for this part carried the same suggestion. The Greek term προοίμιον meant "before the song" (προοίμιον); the Latin term exordium meant "beginning a web", laying a warp (exordiri). The basic function of the introduction then is to lead the audience into the discourse.

Instinctively we feel that an abrupt, immediate entry into the body of our discourse would unsettle and confuse the audience. We sense that in most instances

an audience must, as it were, be "eased into" the subject of the discourse. Generally this preparation for the audience has a twofold aspect: 1) it informs the audience of the end or object of our discourse, and 2) it disposes the audience to be receptive to what we say. Aristotle remarked that the introduction to some speeches was comparable to the preliminary flourishes that flute players made before their performance -an overture in which the musicians merely displayed what they could play best to gain the favor and the attention of the audience for the main performance. Without this kind of "ornamental" introduction, the discourse would have an abrupt, negligent, unfinished air about it. However, sometimes, such a start can be effective in another way. I am thinking for instance, outside the musical realm, of a trick as old as some Latin poems that start *in medias res* ("in the middle of the matter"), where the goal of the introduction is to involve immediately the audience in an emotional way, even upsetting at times. If we look now at musical parallels, there are many examples of what an "eased" entrance can be. Out of thousands of musical intros, the beginning of beautiful G. B. Fontana's Sonata Seconda is an exemplary demonstration of how the main musical idea of the piece (a scale on a third interval) can be presented clearly and simply in the first 7 bars. Another baroque piece of a composer who really seems to follow Mattheson's advice in his works is the b-minor Sonata for flute and harpsichord by JS Bach. Also here, the short and clear declares to the audience what this sonata is about (bars 1-2): the two main themes -one melodic and melancholic, the other twisted and tormented with strange intervals- are presented. On the other side, another of Bach's flute sonata, the one in e-minor, exploits exactly the

opposite: here the discourse plunges immediately into "the heart of the matter", as if we as listeners were cast at once in the middle of a gloomy reflection or atmosphere.

As I hope I have already demonstrated in this paper, I believe that for a musician there would be no real interesting end in talking about rhetoric in music as a mere intellectual or musicological investigation, if this did not bring something to the performance practice as well. A rhetorically oriented research should always influence the performance of a piece - of course with no pretense for an objective and indisputable result but only according to one's own judgement and taste. Personal judgement and taste, in fact, are two elements that we cannot exclude, luckily, from any artistic achievement!

Focussing our attention back to the two works by JS Bach above mentioned, a possible way to establish the initial atmosphere is to have the accompanist (or accompanists, having for example a cello joining the harpsichord) starting the piece with a little dwelling upon the first chord, whereas the soloist starts a bit later than he is supposed to, almost rushing into his line, as if indeed in the middle of a discourse that has started already before. The sonata by Fontana, on the other side, will start in a calm mood, with clear and slow gestures, both for the soloist and the accompanist. The concept of "gestures" is essential, as we have seen, with that part of the rhetorical presentation of a discourse (may it be a spoken or a musical one) that deals with how to present and to stress in the most effective way the different feelings and concepts involved, and the different messages that one wants to convey.

NARRATIO, OR "STATEMENTS OF FACTS"

From Quintilian (book IV, ch.2): *"It is a most natural and frequently necessary proceeding, that after preparing the mind of the judge in the manner described above we should indicate the nature of the subject on which he will have to give judgment: that is the statement of facts. ... The statement of facts consists in the persuasive exposition of that which either has been done, or is supposed to have been done, or, to quote the definition given by Apollodorus, is a speech instructing the audience as to the nature of the case in dispute. Most writers, more especially those of the Isocratean school, hold that it should be lucid, brief and plausible (for it is of no importance if we substitute clear for lucid, or credible or probable for plausible)".*

Statement of fact figures principally in forensic oratory. In this division of a forensic speech, the advocate set forth the essential facts of the case under consideration. In a court trial, what often initiates this part of the trial is the reading of the formal indictment against the defendant -in other words, the defining of the issue in the case. The statement of fact is fundamentally expository. In this section we are informing our readers of the circumstances that need to be known about our subject. In music, this means to expose the musical material – the theme or the themes – that is at the core of the piece.

PROBATIO OR PROOF

Following Quintilian's text: *"In the natural order of things the statement of facts is followed by the verification. For it is necessary to prove the points which we stated with the proof in view. ... A proposition may for instance be put forward unsupported, as is generally done in*

conjectural cases: "The formal accusation is one of murder, but I also charge the accused with theft." Or it may be accompanied by a reason: "Gaius Cornelius is guilty of an offence against the state; for when he was tribune of the plebs, he himself read out his bill to the public assembly."

This is the part where a lower gets down to the main business of his discourse, therefore this part is central and represents the main body of the speech, that is, a further demonstration of the argument exposed before. It is in this part of the discourse principally that one adds all the material pertinent to the subject of to strengthen even more the initial theme / idea.

REFUTATION OR DUBITATIO

So far we have been dealing only with strategic sequence of arguments when we have merely to confirm our own case. However, in a legal case, some additional problems present themselves when we have also to refute opposing views. In a public debate, involving an alternation of speakers, opposing views are actually voiced. A lower must therefore fight against and answer to the objections moved against his client. The opposing views to the speaker's argument are XXXIXLIIXXXI represented in music by the introduction of a new theme, opposite to the one of the main argument. This can be obtained by exploiting new melodic and/or rhythmical and/or harmonic musical themes, contrasting with the previous ones used in the piece.

PERORATIO

Quintilian: *"The next subject which I was going to discuss was the peroration which some call the*

completion and others the conclusion. There are two kinds of peroration, for it may deal either with facts or with the emotional aspect of the case. The repetition and grouping of the facts, which the Greeks call XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX and some of our own writers call the enumeration, serves both to refresh the memory of the judge and to place the whole of the case before his eyes, and, even although the facts may have made little impression on him in detail, their cumulative effect is considerable."

In music, this is the final part where the composer recapitulates the main themes. He can make it also adding some emotional stress in the figures.

**SUGGESTIONS FOR A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF J.S. BACH'S
B-MINOR SONATA FOR FLUTE AND HARPSICHORD¹**

¹ this text is taken from the booklet of a CD containing my recording of this sonata for BIS ("The Father, The Son and the Godfather", performed by Paradiso Musicale for BIS 2011. All copyrights reserved). A longer paper on this subject will be hopefully published soon.

Johan Sebastian Bach spent 27 years in Leipzig as cantor of Thomasschule. During his time in Leipzig, Bach wrote a staggering number of works – among them cantatas and passions – but initially he also taught various subjects at the Thomasschule, including Latin and rhetoric. We know for certain that his knowledge of Latin rhetoric was extensive, from the same sources which tell us that he knew perfectly "the parts ... that the composition of a musical work have in common with rhetoric". There are different German sources where we find hints at Bach's knowledge in the rhetorical field. Particularly interesting is an article written in 1739 by Johann Abraham Birnbaum "Verteidigung Bachs gegen Scheibes Angriffe". Likely, the article was published in Leipzig but we cannot be

sure. The article is lost but a reprinted version is found in Johann Adolf Scheibe, "Der critische Musikus", Hamburg 2nd edition 1745. My previous quote is from pag. 841 of the latter work.

Thus it seems clear that Bach agreed with the thought current among theorists (such as Johann Mattheson) and composers of his time, according to which a musical work must follow the rhetorical rules of an oration in order to move the audience. The rhetorical approach has

been an inspiring point of view in the interpretation of the *Sonata in B minor*, especially in the case of the first movement, where it has seemed possible to find the five sections of a Latin rhetorical speech, for which we will use Mattheson's terms. The *exordium* ('introduction': bars 1-4) is followed by the *narratio* ('presentation of the facts': 5-20), where the main theme is presented, characterized by a melodic voice supported by a continuous, contorted accompaniment. The *confirmatio* ('demonstration': 21-58), which brings new 'proofs', thus expanding the musical material, is followed by the *confutatio* ('confutation': 58-79), the section of an oration in which the defender rejects doubts and accusations against his cause. In this particular case, this section opposes a feeling of hope to the previous atmosphere of despair, with a highly melodic, step-wise motion in flowing triplets. This however ends up again with a contorted succession of notes in the bass, resulting in unexpected harmonies which bring the movement almost to a total collapse ... before the *peroratio* ('plea': 79-119), in which the previous mood is re-established and we find all the elements of the initial theme, similar to how a lawyer, towards the end of a trial, recapitulates all the things said.

During the course of the following two movements the sonata develops towards a formal relaxation, which is

reflected also in the mood. After the overly-complicated and tormented first movement, we thus rest in the simple *Siciliana* of the *Largo e dolce*, but in the background, a syncopated rhythm and broken chords full of tension instil a sense of anxiety. In the final movement, although the form – a fugue followed by a gigue – becomes more elaborate, the piece seems to stabilize and the struggle between formal and emotional elements reaches a *diminuendo*, governed by the intellect: the incessant rhythm of the finale is a dance written just for the mind.

CONCLUSIONS

In this paper I have tried to describe what classical rhetoric meant for the composers and the theoreticians of the baroque era. I have also insisted on the fact that studies and investigations of the way rhetoric has influenced music in the past should ultimately aim at improving our performance practice as musicians. In the past 25 years there have been some interesting contributions to this discussion. However, still a lot must be done to promote this rhetorical approach, for example in the work of Italian baroque composers such as Frescobaldi and of JS Bach. This is true both for what concerns musicological analysis as well as performances. Besides, in a Europe where classical culture is threatened once more – it happened once before during the "dark ages" of the barbaric invasions of ancient Rome – it is important in my opinion to arouse in the young generations of musicians the interest in knowing more about the ancient culture that so much gave to the wonderful and unique civilization developed in the Western side of the world. Without this research in the past, we would miss not only a good deal of what most of baroque

music is about, but also a huge piece of our own identity as Western souls.

APPENDIX: RHETORICAL FIGURES USED IN MUSIC

abruptio: in rhetoric, "breaking off", "unpredictability", see *ellipsis*

accumulation: Summary of previous arguments in a forceful manner

anabasis: a rhetorical figure that we don't find outside the musical field; a form of hypotyposis (see below) that depicts an ascent or a climb with a rising scale

anadiplosis: Repetition of a pattern at the end of a clause at the beginning of another

anaphora: Repetition of the same note or group of notes at the beginning of successive clauses

anastrophe: Inversion of the usual note order

anticlimax: Arrangement of groups of notes in order of decreasing intensity

anthiteton: juxtaposition of opposite meanings (in counterpoint, rhythm, harmonies)

antithesis: Juxtaposition of opposing or contrasting ideas

aposiopesis: Breaking off or pausing musical speech for dramatic or emotional effect.

apposition: Placing of two elements side by side, in which the second defines the first

cacophony: Juxtaposition of notes producing a harsh sound (*durezza*)

catabasis: a form of hypotyposis that depicts a descent, fall, drop with a descending scale

chiasmus: Note order in one phrase is inverted in the other (inverted

parallelism).

circumlocution: "playing around" a theme by substituting or adding notes, as in periphrasis

climax: Arrangement of notes in order of increasing intensity **commoratio:** Repetition of an idea, "re-worded"

ellipsis: Omission (of a consonance, of a cadence, of a conclusion) **epanalepsis:** Repetition of the initial note or notes of a phrase at

the end of the phrase epistrophe: Repetition of the same note or group of notes at the end

of successive phrases. The counterpart of anaphora (also known as antistrophe)

euphony: Opposite of cacophony - i.e. pleasant sounding exclamation: An emphatic addition, involving an emotional response.

Usually it exploits a different intonation, a jump, a note which

is taken from a third or a fourth below.

irony: for instance, use of a text that conveys a meaning opposite to

that of the music that supports the text

isocolon: Use of parallel structures of the same length in successive clauses

hypotyposis: lively description of an action, event, person, passion, etc.

non sequitur: Statement that bears no relationship to the context preceding

onomatopoeia: use of notes that imitates a real sound (e.g. bells or chirps, etc.)

parallelism: The use of similar structures in two or more clauses

paraprosdokian: Unexpected ending or truncation of a phrase
parenthesis: Insertion of a clause or sentence in a place where it interrupts the natural flow of the sentence
paronomasia: in rhetoric, two words with a similar sound; in music, the repetition of a musical idea with the same notes but with few alterations (melodic, dynamic, rhythmic)
parrhesia: in classical rhetoric, "speaking openly or boldly", in music *durezza*, unusual dissonances
passus duriusculus: chromatic scales aiming at creating pathos. Also **saltus duriusculus:** "strange" intervals such as a seventh, an augmented second, fourth or fifth
polyptoton: Repetition of notes or musical patterns derived from the same theme in a different context (register)
pun: When a group of notes or a theme is used in two different senses (= musical context)
symploce: Simultaneous use of anaphora and epistrophe: the repetition of the same note or group of notes at the beginning and the end of successive phrases
suspensio: delayed resolution
suspiratio: the breaking of the phrase that imitates a sigh. **tnesis:** two contiguous phrases separated by a pause.

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