

DURATIONAL PACING IN HANDEL'S
INSTRUMENTAL WORKS:
THE NATURE OF TEMPORALITY IN THE MUSIC OF THE
HIGH BAROQUE

by

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Volume one: Text

Introduction and Chapters 1-3

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Music in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Music.

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Abstract

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For all the advances in musicology and music theory during the past century, we still know very little about Baroque phrase rhythm and temporality—what determines the length of phrases and periods, how phrases and periods relate, or how the music flows at a steady beat without becoming monotonous. These and many related questions cut across the border between theory and history, and they invite interdisciplinary exploration, one that includes narrative theory. To find some answers we must first relate the tonal and the durational components of the music to each other and to the narrative discourse of the composition. With this task in mind, I tackle the joint phenomena of pacing and pace expansion, treating them as the critical common denominators that run

through all the elements of the music. It is they who forge a network of tonal, durational, and narrative links between the elements.

From the hierarchy of paces I single out the *basic pace*—the underlying, even movement of the outer voices—as the durational component that articulates both the contrapuntal and the narrative structures of the piece. The basic pace is the durational earmark of Bach’s, Handel’s, and Scarlatti’s high instrumental style. While I limit my investigation to Handel’s keyboard and orchestral works, I demonstrate how my approach may be modified to tackle the more informal rhythms that animate the middle style of Vivaldi, Telemann, and Couperin.

To penetrate the narrative discourse of each piece, I link the developmental and progressive expansion of the basic pace (which ranges from plain sequential expansions to double, triple, quadruple, or even larger sequential expansions) to the realization of plot archetypes that are common in the compositions of the high style. I then trace the prevalence of both expansion and archetype to tensions between assorted borrowings: Handel, like other composers, often selects borrowings that are purposely incompatible with each other.

In order to carry out this analytical inquiry, which occupies chapters 1, 4, and 5, I include a theoretical survey of Handel’s duple and triple meters in chapters 2 and 3. I use the survey to show how norms of pacing, grouping, and displacement form the stage on which the plot archetypes, the narrative discourse, and the expansion of the basic pace are played out in concert with each other.

Going beyond the enlargement of pace, I conclude that it is the phenomenon of expansion in its many garbs—motivic enlargement, grouping modulation, incremental

periodicity, to name but a few—that helps tie all these seemingly disparate elements of the music’s temporality together. By transforming an explicit or implicit model into a spacious developmental entity, each expansion enables the composition to argue, propel, and resolve its narrative argument despite the unrelenting momentum of the surface.

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I extend thanks to the remaining members of my Dissertation Committee—Ellie M. Hisama, Chair, and Wayne C. Petty—whose careful perusal of the manuscript enhanced the final product quite considerably.

As I explain in the Introduction, my dissertation takes as its point of departure the seminal works on meter, rhythm, and phrase rhythm that Carl Schachter and William Rothstein have published over the years, and it comes into close contact with the

theoretical work of Ido Abravaya, Eytan Agmon, Edward Aldwell, L. Poundie Burstein, William E. Caplin, Laurence Dreyfus, Walter Frisch, Robert Gjerdingen, Floyd K. Grave, Robert S. Hatten, Timothy L. Jackson, Roger Kamien, Kevin Korsyn, Jonathan D. Kramer, Harald Krebs, Steve Larson, David Lasocki, Edward Laufer, Justin London, Jairo Moreno, Anthony Newcomb, Wayne C. Petty, William Renwick, Frank Samarotto, and Zdenek Skoumal. It also connects with the historical work of Terence Best, John H. Roberts, David Schulenberg, Reinhard Strohm, Douglas Townsend, and the late Eugene K. Wolf. I wish to thank all these scholars, as well as Bruce Gustafson, John Rothgeb, Paul Scheepers, and Brent Yorgason for their kindness and patience in responding to various queries in person, by mail, or through e-mail.

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deserves credit for the elegant shape that the examples, all of them substantially revised and resized, finally took.

The dissertation could not have been completed without the help of family and friends, who stood by me through thick and thin. My mother, Ruth Willner, as well as Penny Edgar, Martha Eddy, Margaret Grave, Blythe Kropf, Mitch Rabinowitz, Gail Rehman, Hedi Siegel, Eric Wen, and Leslie Smolen Wuebben have my gratitude for bearing with me and helping out in ways more numerous than I could relate during the (very) long period of authorship.

Finally, a word about Ernst Oster, to whose memory the dissertation is dedicated. I studied with Oster in class at the Mannes College of Music between the years of 1972 and 1977, and I remember vividly how suspicious he was of both rhythmic studies and departures from Schenkerian theory. In his magically quaint way he once said, “Ever since I arrived in this country, everyone has been trying to study rhythm. Frankly, *I* find it the hardest thing.” He also felt that it is incumbent upon those who interfere with Schenker’s formulations to come up with a commensurable alternative—an all but impossible feat. Notwithstanding my focus on rhythmic issues and my adoption of David Neumeier’s three-part *Ursatz*, I have tried to preserve the spirit and the essence of Oster’s approach—that never-ending quest for the telling detail that might shed artistic light on the whole—throughout the dissertation. I can only hope that I have succeeded in some measure, and that Ernst would have liked the results.

to the memory of Ernst Oster

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