

PAUL COLLINS, *THE STYLUS PHANTASTICUS AND FREE KEYBOARD MUSIC OF THE NORTH GERMAN BAROQUE* (Hants: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2005), ISBN 0-7546-3416-7, xv + 229pp, £45/\$89.95.

In recent years a number of studies of seventeenth-century music have sought various ways to approach the analysis and understanding of compositions that inhabit the liminal space between the clarity of renaissance counterpoint and eighteenth-century concepts of formal and harmonic balance. Eric Chafe's study of Monteverdi is a case in point, attempting to utilize harmonic concepts and vocabulary based on seventeenth-century writers rather than the anachronistic views of later authors.¹ In particular, Chafe based his work in part upon one of the most misunderstood theorists of this era, Athanasius Kircher (1602–1680). As stated by Buelow, 'Although frequently criticized for his attitudes which to later writers seem unscientific, and often neglected because of his difficult Latin prose, [Kircher] was nevertheless one of the leading figures in the music theory of the Baroque period.'²

One of the most useful concepts derived from Kircher's great work on music, the *Musurgia universalis* (Rome, 1650), is that of the *stylus phantasticus*. Not only was it a vital part of the critical vocabulary of music for over a century following its first presentation, it has come to serve a number of modern writers, especially those interested in the music of Dieterich Buxtehude.³ Into this rich mixture of studies and scholarly opinions, Paul Collins has brought an insightful critical perspective that clarifies a number of earlier misconceptions about how Kircher's concept was changed and reinterpreted by later writers and how it can be utilized to bring clarity to the discussion of late seventeenth-century music.

Over half of Collin's monograph is devoted to a detailed examination of the *stylus phantasticus* concept. He begins in the first three chapters with a concise overview of how musical style was classified by various authors in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, continues with a clear exposition (and lucid translations of Kircher's Latin derived from earlier authors or his own), and then examines how Kircher's concept was utilized by later writers, such as Janovka, Brossard, Mattheson, Walther, and Grassineau. In this last section, in particular, Collins presents clearly how 'from being a vehicle for the display of compositional *artificium* and a didactic tool to illustrate good contrapuntal writing, Kircher's stylistic category became primarily a

¹ Eric Chafe, *Monteverdi's Tonal Language* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1992).

² George Buelow, 'Kircher, Athanasius,' *Grove Online* [accessed October 31, 2006].

³ See, for example, the recent article by Pieter Dirksen, 'The Enigma of the *stylus phantasticus* and Dietrich Buxtehude's Praeludium in G Minor (BuxWV 163),' in *Orphei Organi Antiqui: Essays in Honor of Harald Vogel*, ed. Cleveland Johnson (Seattle: Westfield Center, 2006), 107–32.

performance-oriented concept for Mattheson, referring especially to extemporary ability' (53).

One point made by Collins that I might nuance differently concerns the significance and interpretation of Froberger. Constantijn Huygens remarked in a letter that he had encountered a musician 'who had—as he says, “evidently much profited from conversations with Mr. Froberger, showing much of his method and rhythm in playing some of his pieces, in the highest style I ever have seen...”’ (92). The freedom in performance implied not only by this letter but also by the performance indications on some of Froberger's compositions led Collins to state that 'the “right discretion” demanded of would-be performers of Froberger's music by Princess Sibylla relates to the good judgement later associated by Mattheson with the appropriate performance of works in the *stylus phantasticus*' (92). I do not argue that there is a strong case for equating Froberger's style of performance with the freedom later associated with the *stylus phantasticus* by Mattheson, but I believe that in terms of the seventeenth century, there is another possible interpretation.

Clearly the performance of his music was of great concern to Froberger, but few of his autograph scores contain significant hints as to what was expected in terms of tempo and ornamentation. The recent rediscovery of an important Froberger source in the collections of the Berlin Sing-Akademie (ms. SA 4450) has added a great deal to our knowledge of these aspects of the Froberger style.⁴ In addition to the many indications for 'lentement' and 'à la discretion' in the various dances (especially the opening allemandes), this source includes similar indications in each of the six toccatas. In fact, each begins with a section marked 'Cette Toccate se joüe a discretion jusque à...♀' (This toccata is to be played with discretion until...[the sign] ♀). In each case the sign occurs where the musical style shifts from what is apparently a free passage to a more strict polyphonic or imitative texture. This same source also contains elaborate explications for some of the dance movements, equating them either with external events (such as in the *Lamenti* for the passing of Ferdinand III and his son, Ferdinand IV), or with autobiographical events, such as Froberger's London Lament or his Rhein Journey. The nature of these 'programs' is often not clear in the music itself, and Wollny in his preface to the facsimile and edition comments that 'This multitude of levels of meaning betrays a predilection for clandestine messages comprehensible only to the initiated—a predilection also touched on in one of Froberger's letters to Athanasius Kircher.'⁵ In my opinion, it is this almost hermetic

⁴ Johann Jacob Froberger, *Toccaten, Suiten, Lamenti: Die Handschrift SA 4450 der Sing-Akademie zu Berlin, Faksimile und Übertragung*, ed. Peter Wollny (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 2004).

⁵ Froberger, XXII.

approach to music and its meanings that most directly links Froberger with the intellectual and compositional freedom embodied in Kircher's concept of the *stylus phantasticus*.

The fourth chapter moves from a focused discussion on the *stylus phantasticus* to the implications of this concept when applied to the analysis of seventeenth-century music. Beginning with brief discussions of solo (lute and keyboard) and ensemble music from Italy, Collins moves expeditiously to an in-depth discussion of the keyboard toccatas of Girolamo Frescobaldi and Michelangelo Rossi. In this chapter, it would have been helpful to have included transcriptions of the examples in tablature rather than just illustrations from the original prints since I doubt few readers would be able to sightread the Kapsberger example. Also, Collins does not discuss the importance of the Habsburg court in Vienna for the dissemination of this 'Italian' instrumental style to the north, but to examine that subject in detail would have been beyond the main focus of this monograph.

The final chapter of Collins's monograph applies his views of the *stylus phantasticus* to the music of eight North German composers: Tunder, Weckmann, Reincken, Buxtehude, Bruhns, Lübeck, Böhm, and Leyding. Though Collins's focus is on the keyboard music of these men, in the cases of Weckmann, Reincken, and Buxtehude much of his insightful discussion could also be applied to their instrumental ensemble music. In this chapter, Collins provides a succinct summary of what I feel is the greatest value of his study:

Discussions of the *stylus phantasticus* in relation to Buxtehude's free organ works have nevertheless focused more often on Mattheson's description of the style in order to account for the inherent drama of these works. By exploring a *via media*, however, a concept of the 'fantastic' embracing Buxtehude the accomplished performer and Buxtehude the composer skilled in learned counterpoint, we can, perhaps reconcile two concepts with very different emphases in one musical persona. Such a meeting of opposites can only do justice to these multi-faceted praeludia. (120)

By searching for that *via media*, Collins has provided a more richly nuanced and culturally sensitive discussion than previously available of the theoretical concepts of the seventeenth century, how these concepts changed over time, and the ways that an understanding of this process of change in the conceptual frameworks can be applied to provide a deeper understanding of the fantastical music of the late seventeenth century.

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