

## German Musical Baroque, a mini European Union *avant la lettre: the bassoon concerto*

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**Abstract:** The German musical Baroque represents a sum of stylistic diversities, in which the European cultural values were merged with the national ones, resulting in a strongly individualized, but malleable style. The works dedicated to the bassoon by German composers are living evidence of aesthetic unity in the Baroque stylistic diversity, emphasizing the universality of music and its cohesive force. The analyzed concertos approach the aesthetics of each composer, through his relationship with Italian and French music, personalized in an expressive form of the German type: robust, in a clear, dynamic solid structure.

**Keywords:** German Baroque, bassoon, stylistic diversity.

### 1. Introduction to the German Musical Baroque

Music is seen, in the Baroque era, as a rhetorical tool: a harmonious sound creation capable of determining certain emotions and feelings in the souls of the listeners. If the Italians tried to produce this effect through a melodic exuberance, the French chose the more subtle path of elegance and sound refinement. German musicians, the real maestros of musical rhetoric, came to master both elements of the Italian language and the peculiarities of the French musical language, creating a specific style, eclectic and malleable, able to adapt and integrate a multitude of timbral possibilities and sound inspiration. The German baroque *melody* imposed itself through diversity, color, register and expressiveness, being a synthesis between exuberance and gallantry. German *harmony* is, in turn, richer in color and functionality than alternative systems of French or Italian music. Also in this field can be observed the typologies of thinking, diverse but, somehow, unitary, in the German space. *Orchestration* is another confluence point, in German music, between Italian effervescence and French gallantry. The German musical Baroque is thus characterized by robustness, dynamism, clarity, a compact and solid structure, and precise articulation.

The desideratum of the unification of cultures in a polymorphic entity, with zonal characteristics affiliated with a whole monolithic structure appears, in the Baroque era, in the form of artistic immersion and stylistic correspondences, highlighted in the form of filiation of a unique, archetypal

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culture, from which emerge, like genealogical branches, vast effluvia of geographical and social peculiarities. The entire European Baroque cultural area has, as an expressive fluency, the *rappel* to its origins in Greek and Roman Antiquity, shaped by the oriental infusions of the Middle Ages. Thus, the baroque expressive flow decentralizes, in Europe, an impressive bundle of folk elements, with geographical specificity, which it directs in a strong aesthetic stream, with common roots and zonal affiliations. This *unity* desideratum one finds clearly formulated in Schiller's poem that underlies Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony, An die Freude* ([*Ode*] to Joy): „Alle Menschen werden Brüder” (*All people become brothers*). Towards this energetic influx with the climax in Beethoven's creation, the baroque music tends, from the very beginning, through the permanent connection of the composers from one land/zone to the aesthetic of other geographical areas. And the bassoon is one of the important instruments used for this purpose, as a stylistic binder, through the creation dedicated to it, in the German music of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. The geographical advantage of the German historical regions, which become, in the Baroque era, a cultural hub, between Italian, French, Spanish and Eastern-European art, results in taking over and assembling, in a common language, the influences of these paradigms, generating, *a priori*, the idea of *unity in diversity*, which underlies, as a *motto*, the current European Union.

In the Baroque, the bassoon was mainly used as a *basso continuo* instrument. The solo repertoire appears relatively late and the contribution of German composers to its enrichment is significant. As a soloist, the bassoon is found both in the position of *concertante* instrument and in that of *obbligato* instrument, or as a partner in a chamber ensemble. It is noticed, during this period, the appearance of the trio-sonata genre dedicated to a chamber ensemble consisting in two oboes and *basso continuo*, with the bassoon as an *obligato* instrument. Concertos dedicated to the instrument, in singularity or in various timbre combinations (with another bassoon or pairing with other/s instrument/s) are also consistent, both in their quantity and in the quality of their academic treatment and musical inspiration.

From the entire musical creation dedicated to the bassoon, belonging to the German Baroque, I have selected three concertos, which I consider edifying, in their artistic motion, to fulfill this desideratum, through the stylistic immersion of the French and Italian aesthetics that one should find in their musical development: *Concerto in C Major for Bassoon, Strings and Basso continuo* by Johann Friedrich Fasch, *Concerto in F Major for Alto Recorder, Bassoon, Strings and Basso continuo* by Georg Philipp Telemann, and *Concerto in E flat Major for Two Bassoons, Strings and Basso continuo* by Johann Gottfried M $\ddot{u}$ thel. I specify from the beginning that I will make a general presentation of these musical works, having the main focus on the defining elements that demonstrate the belonging to universality, supporting the thesis

expressed in the title of this article: the compositional desire for unity, while maintaining the individual conceptual ethos in the German Baroque.

## 2. Johann Friedrich Fasch – *Concerto in C Major for Bassoon, Strings and Basso continuo*, FaWV L:C2

Johann Friedrich Fasch (1688-1758) is one of the important composers of the Baroque, through the new breath of his creation, which is the link between this era and Classicism. Without representing an actually period of transition per se, at the level of melodic stylistics or harmony, Fasch's creation, especially the instrumental one, organizes the sound material in a form of innovative expression, more appropriate to the thematic presentation, in homophone spirit, than to the motivic superposition with which the polyphonic forms are characterized.

The *Concerto in C major for Bassoon, Strings and Basso continuo* most likely belongs to 1740. The tripartite composition and thematic exposition in dialogue are elements similar to the Italian concerto model. Unlike Italian music, however, Fasch's work is more carefully elaborated in the dialogical details and in the extra role that the composer assigns to the solo instrument. The concerto is composed as a continuous expressive flow, in which the orchestral *tutti* proposes a minimal thematic level, with expository character, in opposition to the solo expositions, which are constituted in expository-developing passages. The acute need for virtuosity is lacking, resulting in a more carefully elaborated aesthetic vision regarding the morphological transfigurations of the thematic element. The preponderance of virtuosity in Italian concertos, but also the graceful, efflorescent ornamentation of French gallant music are replaced, in Fasch's work, by a touch of nobility of the themes and their careful development process (Figure 1).



Fig. 1 J. Fr. Fasch, *Concerto*, Mvt. 1, mm. 26-35; *bassoon, continuo*

The absolute involvement of the composer in the creative act represents, in Fasch's music, a strong argument in the favor of the novelty of his writing,

which foresees the classical concerto in its essence. The internal architecture of the concerto movements is, however, based on the baroque principle of dialogue, rather than on the crystallization of the musical forms (see the sonata form in Classicism).

### **3. Georg Philipp Telemann – *Concerto in F Major for Alto Recorder, Bassoon, Strings and Basso continuo*, TWV 52: F1**

Georg Philipp Telemann (1681-1767) is one of the most prolific composers in history (at least in terms of the creation that has survived to this day), with over 3000 works, half of which are lost. Prolific composer, poly-instrumentalist (a virtuoso of flute, oboe, violin, viola da gamba, double bass, harpsichord and church organ), poet, author of textbooks, methods and instrumental and vocal treatises, almost completely self-taught, Telemann is the representation of an ideal in terms of choosing a profession of faith and pursuing continuous improvement. Telemann was a musician highly appreciated during his lifetime by contemporaries. His style combines Italian, German, French and Polish elements, is delicate, noble and accentuates the melodic factor. A peculiarity of the expression of his personality is that, over the years, the composer has enriched his style, by taking over various elements, crystallizing, towards the end of his life, his belonging to the gallant style.

The *Concerto in F major for Alto Recorder, Bassoon, Strings and Basso continuo* has the structure of a church sonata (at a macro level), determined by the architecture in four movements, which follow one another in the order of *slow-fast-slow-fast*, but is delimited by this chamber music genre through timbre consistency and thematic developments. The whole structural and aesthetic paradigm of the concerto-making is built as a dynamic profile in continuous ascent. The tension (rendered both in the form structures, through successive Reprises and thematic developments, as well as in melodic, harmonic and timbre profiles, through dialogues between soloists and orchestra) is configured binarily. A first trajectory takes place during the first two movements - an ascending arch; the accumulation of the first movement is confirmed in the second. The second trajectory includes III<sup>rd</sup> and IV<sup>th</sup> movements – a new ascending arch, in which the accumulation in the third movement is confirmed in the fourth. The timbral-tension climax of the whole work is represented by the strong sonority given by the last thematic recapitulation in the last movement, in which the orchestra also benefits from the soloists' contribution. Here, the sound spectrum is used as a unitary whole. The whole complex of aesthetic utterance is doubled by nobility and (from a technical point of view) by a moderate universe of articulations and ornaments, which is not entirely claimed by the German style, but also by the French or Italian style, representing an agreeable average of them (Figure 2).



Fig. 2 G. Fr. Telemann, *Concerto*, Mvt. 4, mm. 18-23; *recorder, bassoon, continuo*

Telemann's music incorporates several styles existing at the time, in terms of belonging to a geographical-cultural aesthetic. The composer is an exponent of universality, so the performance of his creations must be made according to the aesthetic-affective contour of his musical themes. The ornamentation, in the case of this concerto, must occur in relation to the character of the melody used. Thus, in each of the four movements there are stylistic *pastiches* from the three geographical areas approached by Telemann. The first movement has a German allure, through the “seriousness” of the musical discourse. The ornamentation should be moderate, because the musical discourse is, in itself, rich in expression. Thus, it must be discreet, and can be used as a melodic complement, at the end of a musical phrase, or along the way, in the accompanying formulas. The second movement has an Italian character; therefore the configuration of the performing path leaves no room for ornamentation, the writing being of virtuosity. As there are no slurs, we can opt for the use of the *détaché / staccato* articulation throughout the movement, and in terms of speed and incisive rhythm, on sixteenth formulas, we can apply double tonguing. The third movement, although “French” (in the essence of its sound expression), does not leave room for excessive ornamentation. However, the insertion of mordents or turns can be done, in the solo discourse, by both instrumentalists. Also, the endings of a musical phrase can benefit from the contribution of trills. The fourth movement represents a combination between the German style, from which it takes the rigor and clarity of the thematic expression, in the *fugato* counterpoint spirit, and the Italian one, from which it takes the verve and the writing of virtuosity, complementary to the moments of polyphony. In this movement, the performing act must emphasize the dual character of the music, finding a balance between brilliance and verve (slightly restrained), on the one hand, and rigor and mechanism, on the other hand. This last movement of the concerto must be played with a full, expansive sound, because it is the climax of the entire piece.

#### 4. Johann Gottfried Mützel – *Concerto in E flat Major for Two Bassoons, Strings and Basso continuo*, IJM 1

Johann Gottfried Mützel (1728-1788), composer and virtuoso pianist, was, along with Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, one of the first representative

figures of the *Sturm und Drang* / *Empfindsamkeit* current in music. Situated in a period that determines the end of the Baroque and the beginnings of Classicism, the composer used defining stylistic elements of both historical and cultural contexts, which makes his works be impregnated with a lively, jovial, mostly fluent and sensitive spirit. Müthel is a melodist par excellence. However, the use of instruments, the use of *continuo* accompaniment, as well as the structuring patterns of his concertos, are still dependent on the Baroque era. The composer makes a synthesis between the rigorous counterpoint of the Baroque and the noble and graceful fluidity of Classicism.

The *Concerto in E flat Major for Two Bassoons, Strings and Basso continuo* belongs to the composer's period of maturity, being created in the years when he lived in Riga, but there aren't documents attesting to a specific date on which it was composed, also to which bassoonists it was dedicated. One can only speculate that these instrumentalists were employees of the local orchestra and were virtuosos, judging by analyzing the score and observing the technical difficulties involved in its performance. The form is classical, with a tripartite structure. The movements are alternating in a *fast-slow-fast* form. The influence of early Classicism can be observed in the manner of thematic treatment; the writing, however, remains tributary to the Baroque. The pattern of virtuosity is similar to the Vivaldian style, and the treating of the two bassoons as a block, like a single instrument, is similar to the way in which the Baroque composers handled the musical gesture. Also, although graceful and free of the contrapuntal heaviness, the melody still has reminiscences of the period, both through the ornamentation used and the standardized patterns – sequences in descending fifths (or ascending fourths).

The first movement of the concerto (*Moderato*) has a martial character, the thematic configuration evolving on the dotted formulas, which are declamatory and determined in the aesthetic vision. The general sound spectrum proposes the typical baroque dynamic range (*piano – forte*), but the recourse to small subterfuges of tension oscillations can be achieved. The richness of the rhythmic-melodic formulas that accompany the thematic discourse shows the inventiveness of the composer. The second movement of the concerto (*Adagio*) evolves into a tragic emotional register. The segments dedicated to each of the partners (*solì – tutti*) are wide-ranging emotional melodies and are based on thematic dialogues and cadence completions. The architecture of this movement involves several formal strategies: it is tripartite, similar in musical gesture, structure and thematic organization to the *da capo* aria, and the general emotional aesthetic finds its affinities with the lament in baroque works - alternation of lamentation and passionate declamation; it is strophic, in the sense of the existence of several thematic structures, which are presented in succession; it is redundant, by using the idea of Reprise, in the case of thematic recapitulations. All these structural ordering strategies

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contribute to the configuration of two ascending tension paths, within the movement, determined by the two large sections (A and A harmonic varied). The recapitulation of the initial segment, as a small Reprise (*da capo*), has the role of relaxing the musical discourse, configuring, as a whole, the arch shape of the general affect. The last movement of the concerto (*Allegro*) begins with a musical phrase with the role of motto, in which a complete cadence is performed, which involves the use of steps I, IV and V. Step IV appears more as a melodic distraction, as it evolves on the *E flat* pedal, but auditorily, the cadence is felt in all its fullness. The succinct character of the themes, their freshness, the overflowing dancing cavalcade, as well as the reprise of the main musical phrase as a refrain, figures this movement in the form of a rondo. The structure elements are, however, in a tripartite form, in which the distinctive elements propose a path similar to the sonata form (Exposition, Development and Recapitulation). Thus, we are dealing with a hybrid form, rondo-sonata, treated as long developing segments (configured in the form of sequential or evolutionary cycles) in a typical baroque manner.

The performing strategy eludes the concept of ornamentation and focuses on the tension conduit and the combination of elements related to affect (central element in Baroque) and sensitivity (central element in *Empfindsamkeit*). The peculiarities of instrumental technique required in this concert are located in the area of virtuosity, if one is referring to the bassoon of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, a versatile instrument with a range of almost three octaves, but still more limited in the number of keys (hence the limited fingering chart), comparing to the modern instrument. Fork fingering, the sound emission in the high register or the phrasing of the long melodic lines in legato are aspects that can raise certain problems in the case of the baroque bassoon, even if it is more stable and flexible than other wind instruments of the period (oboe, chalumeau, clarinet, or brass instruments). The articulations used in this work are *legato* and *détaché*, but the latter involves differences in approach, depending on the thematic context in which it is used. Thus, in melodic structures in which the rhythm is dotted, the longer of the two notes (eighth or sixteenth) must be played almost fragmentarily; the dot marks, in the Baroque and *Empfindsamkeit* style, more the emphatic, expansive and unequal character of the note than its extension (Fig. 3).



Fig. 3 J. G. Mühel, *Concerto*, Mvt. 2, mm. 1-4; bassoons I, II, continuo

Another element of instrumental technique is that of connecting the breath (air pressure) when closing / opening the reed with the tongue. The sound “accentuated” in this way (dotted note) must have a maximum tension, after which this tension must be released (hence the swelling of the sound and the feeling of emphasis). This process is specific to the writing of the pompous, exuberant, “royal” movements in the ballets of the French Court, but also to the German, English or Italian works that approached this affective space (majesty, royalty).

## 5. Conclusions

The general characteristics of the German Musical Baroque are robustness, dynamism and clarity, a compact and solid structure, precise articulation. These attributes are the result of a specific aesthetic that generates, in the artistic vision, models closer to the academic style, “rigid”, materialized by taking over and re-shaping the information, in new forms of presentation, characterized as absolutely spectacular. In the Baroque era music is seen as a rhetorical tool, a harmonious sound creation capable of determining certain emotions and feelings in the souls of the listeners. Italian composers produced this effect through melodic exuberance (the harmony and the orchestration being adjuvant elements, used at a “minimal” level of expression). The French chose the more subtle path of elegance and sound refinement (with implications also at the harmonic or orchestration level, not only at the melodic one). German musicians, more focused on the philosophical implications (thus more inclined to exploit the rhetoric), came to master the elements of both the Italian aesthetic language and the peculiarities of the French music, creating a specific style, eclectic and malleable, able to adapt and to integrate a multitude of colorful sounds and inspiration possibilities. The whole sound exposure of the musical creations belonging to the German Baroque is crystallized, as a cultural-musical expression and artistic exuberance, in the form of the motto of the European Union, “United in diversity”<sup>1</sup>. The stylistic and conceptual *unity*

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<sup>1</sup> [https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/symbols/motto\\_en](https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/symbols/motto_en)



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of German musicians is given by the *diversity* of assimilated styles, which have in common the rigorous treatment of themes, the academism of formal structures and the immense inspirational richness of the melody.

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