# The *Stylus Phantasticus* in the Free Organ Works of J. S. Bach and the North German Tradition

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The term *stylus phantasticus*, or the fantastic style, was first introduced by A. Kircher in 1650 to describe music pieces that are relatively free in structure and style. It was later adopted by several German musicians as a description of certain pieces that are particularly virtuosic, improvisatory, and toccata-like. This paper aims to investigate to what extent we can describe some of Bach's free organ works, for instance, the five-part Toccata in E Major (BWV 566), using the *stylus phantasticus* as defined by Kircher, Mattheson, and others. We shall explain how Bach took the North German toccata model developed by his Predecessors such as Buxtehude and Bruhns.

## Definition of STPH

We start by explaining the etymology of. *Stylus phantasticus* (henceforth STPH) was first defined by German Jesuit scholar Athanasius Kircher (1602-1680) in his encyclopedic treatise *Musurgia universalis* (1650). There were many similar attempts throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to classify musical works by styles and genres[1]. According to Kircher, STPH is

> "suitable for instruments. It is the most free and unrestrained method of composing; it is bound to nothing, neither to words nor to a melodic subject; it was instituted to display genius and to teach the hidden design of harmony and the ingenious composition of harmonic phrases and fugues; it is divided into those [pieces] that are commonly called fantasias, ricercatas, toccatas, and sonatas."[2]

[1] For a brief overview of different attempts see Collins, Paul. *The Stylus Phantasticus and Free Keyboard Music of the North German Baroque*. Ashgate, 2005.
[2] Translated by Snyder, Kerala J. *Dieterich Buxtehude, Organist in Lübeck*. Schirmer Books; Collier Macmillan, 1987.

Somewhat different from later interpretations of STPH, ingenuity of harmony is of central concern to Kircher. This observation is further confirmed by the examples Kircher gave to illustrate the concept, the most prominent being the "Hexachord" Fantasia (FbWV 201) by Johann Jakob Froberger. A theme and variation on the six-note solmization theme "Ut, Re, Mi, Fa, So, La" featuring strict, florid, and often imitative counterpoint, frequent change in meter, and contrasting execution of the theme, Kircher praises the piece as having "the most perfect method of composition and of fugues, the order of things following themselves cleverly"[3]. STPH works are not bound to melodic subjects or *cantus firmus*, as are many other music styles at the time. For Kircher, the tension between the bound-to-nothing freeness and the intellectual, contrapuntal orderliness gives rise to the beauty of STPH. Note that Kircher does not regard STPH as a genre, but rather a compositional technique under which many forms of music, including fantasias, ricercatas, toccatas, and sonatas, are composed.

Almost a century later, another major definition of STPH was given by Johann Mattheson (1681-1764), a contemporary of Bach, in the treatise *Der vollkommene Capellmeister* (1739). Here we see a definition motivated by subsequent experiments of STPH since Kircher, most notably by the North German School. Mattheson describes STPH (he calls it the "fantastische Styl") as

> "the freest and least restricted style…allsorts of otherwise unusual passages, obscure ornaments, ingenious turns and embellishments are produced, without close observation of the beat and pitch….yet not without a view to pleasing, to dazzling and to astonishing."[4]

Mattheson's definition agrees with Kircher's only in spirit, recognizing it as the freer style of composition. Different from Kircher though, Mattheson incorporates the idea of performance

[3] See Footnote 2

[4] Translated by Harriss, Ernest C. *Johann Mattheson's Der Vollkommene Capellmeister: A Revised Translation with Critical Commentary*. UMI Research Press, 1981.

and reception into the definition, requiring STPH works to possess a "wowing factor" that shall leave the audience dazzled. Hence not only the music itself, but also the virtuosity of the performer must be put on display. The North German organist composed large-scale, virtuosic *pedaliter* works that easily meet this criteria. Seeing that the main objective of STPH is to impress and to excite, Kircher's demand of having the most strict and perfect counterpoint is relaxed. Mattheson's definition of STPH is indeed looser than Kricher's. But that does not mean that counterpoint is completely forfeited, and Mattheson specifically warned against the lost harmonic integrity by saying that

> "One is restricted in this style of writing only to the rules of harmony, to no others. The principal motifs and subjects cannot be completely ignored just because of the improvisatory nature; they may over not be done in sequence, much less be regularly performed: hence those composers who work out formal fugues in their fantasias or toccatas do not maintain the integrity of this style, for nothing is so very contrary to it as order and constraint."[5]

A true STPH work demonstrates the dialectic between freedom and constraint by having contrasting free passages and fugal passages. It is precisely this tension that makes STPH attractive. Note that Mattheson also includes the key term, "improvisatory", into the definition. Note also that by Mattheson's standard, Froberger's fantasia no longer fits the definition of STPH. Besides the general spirit and attentiveness to harmony, Mattheson also agrees with Kircher in regarding STPH as a style that governs many genres including fantasias, toccatas, capriccios and preludes. Hence in our investigation to follow, we do not confine ourselves with fantasias. In fact as we shall see, toccatas and preludes can be seen to be in the "fantastic style" as much as any fantasias, if not more so.

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[5] See Footnote 4

Several other sources also outline defining qualities of STPH and its related genres. Michael Praetorius, a generation earlier than Kircher, went into detail the composition procedure of capriccio, a genre of STPH: "one starts working out a fugue at one's pleasure, but, without continuing with it very long soon passes on to another according to one's fancy"[6]. As we shall see shortly this description is in line with many STPH works in the late seventeenth century, especially the Praeludium in E Minor "Großes" by Bruhns. Praetorius also describes toccata as individualistic and "performed freely and extemporaneously, with plain chords and runs". Ton Koopman, when explaining Buxtehude's association with STPH, describes it as "a rhetorical style, full of improvisation (or imitating a free improvisation), without tempo relation, full of unexpected changes of mood, tempo, color, sudden pauses"[7].

## Case Study of STPH in Bach's Predecessors

We have already discussed the Froberger "Hexachord" Fantasia, which was the prime example illustrating Kircher's definition of STPH but does not fit into the later definition by Mattheson. If one were to pick one piece of work that serves as the definitive prototype of STPH by Mattheson's eighteenth century definition, one needs to look nowhere else than the Praeludium in E Minor "Großes" by Nicolaus Bruhns.

### Bruhns Praeludium in E Minor "Großes"

The piece consists of two fugues sandwiched between an introduction, an interlude, and a conclusion. Immediately from the start of the introduction (mm. 1-20) we see a zig-zag chromatic passage that almost seems like a warm-up when the composer is asked to improvise. The first sentence finishes with an extensive florid written-out trill accompanied

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[6] Translated by Lampl, Hans. *The Syntagma Musicum of Michael Praetorius, Volume Three: An Annotated Translation*. American Choral Directors Association, 2001.
[7] Koopman, Ton. "Dietrich Buxtehude's Organworks: A Practical Help." *The Musical Times*, vol. 132, no. 1777, 1991, pp. 148–53.

by pedal point in low E. Then starting from m. 6 the time signature changes from common time to an unusual 18/16, and more improvisatory passages begin pouring out. On the manual phrases of similar figures are imitated by left and right hands, while the pedal point continues to provide structural support in tonic and then in subdominant, not lifting up until the very end of the introduction. In contrast to the relatively static pedal, we see thirty-second notes appear on the manual together with frequent, almost spontaneous changes in meter. The first fugue spans from m. 21 to m. 80 with a subject as chromatic as the introduction passages, and as Praetorius said, does not continue very long before entering into another idea, in this case, the fuge springs into a free interlude (mm. 80-132). The interlude again features frequent changes in meter, tempo, and rhythmic figures, but within each section ideas are executed imitatively. In particular we see fast-running arpeggios (mm. 95-110) repeated broken chords (mm. 126-129), which we will see similar passages in Bach's STPH music.

Measures 132-154 is a shorter fugue, this time in 12/8. The subject consists of two parts, the first of which , a four-note descending motif is possibly adapted from the descending figures in the introduction of the descending chromatic scale of the first fugue; the second of which has three notes that each differ by a semitone, which comes from the previous adagio (mm. 91-94). Since the subject is short and characterized by conspicuous dotted rhythm, we hear frequent return of it, sometimes imitatively (mm. 140-141) and sometimes homophonically (mm. 142-143). In fact, it might be more appropriate to call it a "fugal presentation of an idea" rather than a strict, formal fugue. Finally, as do almost all STPH pieces, the piece concludes with a freewheeling passage that contains elements hinting back at previous fugal materials. In the short span of the final two bars, we see the dotted triplet figure (the rhythmic material from the second fugue) appearing eleven times. With the foot firmly holding down the mighty E pedal note, the rambling spill of consciousness has come to an end.

The reason for this piece being the archetype of STPH in the eighteenth century is it corresponds to Mattheson's definition of being improvisatory, dazzling, and containing fugal passages. Keys, meters, and rhythms contrast frequently, which calls for accommodating changes in registration that Bruhns himself did not specify. In particular, the statement-like introductory passages should require a full, heavy, and wall-like sound, exploiting the full power of the organ and the soundscape it is capable of creating. We also see in the piece the characteristic opening and coda of a STPH piece, with pedal note providing support to the florid passages on the manual. In fact, many of Bach's works that we might consider to be in the STPH style contain fugues and fugatos dissolving into a free ending, as we shall see shortly. The subject of the second fugue is taken from previous passages with some rhythmic and harmonic modification, and the same figure appears throughout the coda, providing thematic unity to otherwise separated sections, which is also very iconic of STPH works of the North German School. Indeed, thematic consistency is the thin thread that pulls together the otherwise divided sections. Juxtaposition of remote keys in the arpeggio section and chromaticism is also what contributes to the fantastic style.

Another important precursor of Bach in STPH writing is Dietrich Buxtehude, who taught both Bruhns and Bach. In fact, the examples given by Mattheson to illustrate the term STPH were wrongly labeled as "the beginning of a toccata by Froberger", where in fact, as Synder pointed out[8], are the beginning measures of a Buxtehude Praeludium in Phrygian Mode (BuxWV 152), which, as Collins remarked[9], is perhaps not the best piece to illustrate STPH. Hence instead of this Praeludium, we will look at another brilliant work by the Lübeck

[8] Snyder, Kerala J. *Dieterich Buxtehude, Organist in Lübeck*. Schirmer Books; Collier Macmillan, 1987.
[9] Collins, Paul. *The Stylus Phantasticus and Free Keyboard Music of the North German Baroque*. Ashgate, 2005.

master, the Praeludium in F-Sharp Minor (BuxWV 146). We will pay particular attention to the constantly changing texture in those works, and how they symbolize STPH. As recognized by Archbold[10], it is a baroque view that *stylus phantasticus* is even considered as a texture-oriented classification.

**Buxtehude Praeludium in F-Sharp Minor (BuxWV 146)**

Structurally, Praeludium in F-Sharp Minor consists of four sections: introduction (mm. 1-29), two consecutive fugatos (*Grave* mm. 30-49, and *Vivace* mm. 50-78), and an extensive ending (mm. 79-129) taking up a third of the total length. The introduction is itself divided into four parts, a flourish beginning consisting of zig-zag monophonic passages, much alike the *bravura* beginning of the Bruhns Praeludium in E Minor, followed by a pedal point on tonic with repetitive four note figures on the manual, a chordal passage, and yet another pedal point. The first fugue, marked in *Grave*, contains a poignant theme with far leaps and bold harmonic characters not unlike Bach. It ends with what Archbold calls a "modular" passage, where two exact same figures are repeated in mm. 48-49. The subject of the second Vivace fugata gets its four-note subject from the figure of the introductory flourish, and it soon dissolves into an intensive repetition of the figure in the similar "modular" form (mm. 74-78). The expansive coda begins with ornamental thirty-second notes and sixty-fourth notes wandering between hands and feet (mm. 79-83). Then it travels outside the common harmonic ambitus into the distant G-sharp minor (mm. 84-87), before quickly turning into another rhapsody on the four-note figure from the second fugue. Textures become simpler and more static from m. 111 to the end, with long pedal notes spanning nine bars and repetitive spinning motion on both hands. It seems like the kind of thing one does when one is asked to improvise, simply because it is easier to do.

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[10] Archbold, Lawrence. *Style and Structure in the Praeludia of Dietrich Buxtehude*. UMI Research Press, 1985.

Spitta commented[11] that in this prelude Buxtehude "gives the reins to his fancy", and that "as it proceeds it is full of deep expression directly prophetic of Bach". At the end of each fugato we see the tendency of taking the subject and transforming it into an almost ostinato-like figure in the free section. We also notice high virtuosity of whoever it is to perform such a piece: constant sixteenth notes on the pedal is typical of the North German organ tradition. Even today, performance of such a work creates quite a sensation to the listeners, achieving what STPH aims to achieve.

We point out some other exceptionally "fantastic" pieces of Buxtehude for readers to look into: Praeludium in C Major (BuxWV 137) for its beginning statement, virtuosic pedal writing, theatrical pauses, and repeated figures; and Praeludium in E Major (BuxWV 141) for its unpredictable changes in rhythm, tempo, texture, and harmony, and also its written-out ornamentations. Another shorter work by Pachelbel, the Toccata in E Minor, also exemplifies the STPH tradition. Interested readers are highly encouraged to listen to these exciting pieces that sadly we do not have time to explore in detail here.

## Case Study of STPH in Bach's Organ Works

For musicologist Friedhelm Krummacher, Bach's free organ works do not display the STPH as defined by Mattheson[12], mainly because it contains a prelude-fugue paired design as opposed to the older multipartite, free-fugal alternating structure of North German toccatas. That is a rather constricted understanding of STPH, for STPH is anything but a definite structure, prescribing only the idea of contrasting free and contrapuntal sections and not

[11] Page 276-277, Volume 1 of Spitta, Philipp, et al. *Johann Sebastian Bach: His Work and Influence on the Music of Germany, 1685-1750*. Novello and company, limited; H. W. Gray Co., 1899.
[12] Krummacher, Friedhelm. "Bach's Free Organ Works and the *Stylus Phantasticus*." *J.S. Bach as Organist: His Instruments, Music, and Performance Practices*. Indiana University Press, 1986.

requiring it to be strictly in order. Furthermore, some of Buxtehude's preludes, which were the examples Mattheson had in mind when defining the STPH, are in the paired design just like Bach's preludes and fugues written several years later. Hence the argument that most earlier toccatas are in the multipartite form is no reason to disassociate Bach's paired works with STPH. Even in the paired form, many of Bach's fugues return to an exuberant free coda resembling the aforementioned works by his predecessors. That is, if we regard the unusually long free coda sections at the end of some prelude and fugues as separate sections, then Bach's reflection on earlier STPH becomes evident. Examples include Prelude and Fugue in C Minor (BWV 549), where the pedal part does not appear until m. 40 of the fugue starting from which it merges into a toccata, taking up more than one third of the fugue in length. Similarly in the Prelude and Fugue in C Major (BWV 531), the pedal comes in after a long break playing no other but pedal note on the dominant, a definitive characteristic of STPH, signifying the merging of fugue and toccata, not without the thirty-second note tickling on the manual. Notable also in this extremely youthful work is the prelude part, which starts with a fugal entrance and ends in the same fashion as the later fugue counterpart, drowning in the vortex of broken figures and fast-running florid passages typical of the fantastic style. Despite its formal pairing, a four-part free-fugal alternation is a more accurate description of this piece of work. The following table records the multipartite structure of some works of Bach. Those sections containing particular free and fantastical elements and textures are marked in asterisk (*).

| Title | BWV | Date[13] | Prelude /Fantasy | Fugue |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Prelude & Fugue in C Major | 531 | c. 1707 | ***mm. 1-32:** constant free motion<br>***mm. 33-end:** interrupted cadenza | **mm. 1-65:** fugue<br><br>***mm. 66-end:** pedal point |
| Prelude & Fugue in D Major | 532 | c. 1710 | ***mm. 1-15:** interrupted cadenza, pedal point, ornamental<br>***mm. 16-95:** constant motion in alla breve<br>**mm. 95-end:** adagio coda | **mm. 1-97:** fugue proper<br>***mm. 97-end:** modular constant motion merging into free coda |
| Prelude & Fugue in E Minor, Prelude | 533/1 | c. 1708 | ***mm. 1-10:** ornamental<br>***mm. 11-27:** broken chordal<br>***mm. 28-end:** ornamental | / |
| Prelude & Fugue in F Minor, Prelude | 534/1 | c. 1708 | **mm. 1-70:** occasionally pedal point<br>***mm. 71-end:** cadenza | / |
| Prelude & Fugue in G Minor | 535 | c. 1708 | ***mm. 1-13:** broken chordal<br>***mm. 14-37:** arpeggio<br>**mm. 38-end:** imitative motion | **mm. 1-70:** fugue<br>***mm. 70-end:** cadenza, pedal point |
| Prelude & Fugue in A Major, Prelude | 536/1 | c. 1708 | ***mm. 1-14:** pedal point, constant motion<br>***mm. 14-end:** imitative motion, pedal point at the end | / |
| Fantasy & Fugue in G Minor, Fantasy | 542 | c. 1717 | *Frequent alternation between dramatic interrupted/pedal point cadenzas and slower contrapuntal passages | / |

**Three Toccatas (BWV 564-566)**

Three toccatas, BWV 564-566, are large-scale reincarnations of the earlier multipartite prelude in the North German STPH model. The first of these, the Toccata in C Major, is written in the Weimar years, while the latter two are generally recognized as youthful works

[13] The dating of these works are somewhat controversial. We take the dating from http://www.berndkolb.ch/Bachseite/. Although the exact year of composition is undetermined, the rough time period is generally correct. As we shall explain later, most of his STPH works are written early in his career.

composed between 1704 and 1706[14]. The Toccata in C Major has three parts, a free toccata, followed by an *Adagio*, a *Grave*, and finally a fugue that dissolves into free passages. This is recognized by Keller[15], who describes the ending of the fugue "flees, runs away, and leaves the listener behind, confused". To account for the change he suggests a brief rise of registration, typical of how STPH passages should be performed, with full brilliance and bravura. The beginning of the toccata features long monotonic fast-running passages (mm. 1-31), either in the hand or on the feet but not both. In particular we see back-to-back repetitions and imitations (mm. 1, 5, 22-23 etc.) which Keller recognizes as "echo" figures. This particular imitation highlights the improvisatory nature. We also see a surprisingly long pedal solo that definitely requires certain virtuosity to perform. Of course this was no trouble to perform or even improvise on the spot for our maestro, who has been famously praised for his exceptional pedal skills by his contemporary Constantin Bellerman: "that others would seem unable to imitate it even with their fingers."[16] Similarly, another witness Mohann Matthias Gesner claimed that Bach plays

> "with both hands and, at the utmost speed, with his feet, producing by himself the most various and at the same time mutually agreeable combinations of sounds in orderly procession."[17]

The STPH suits Bach well for Bach's virtuosic playing.

The manner in which the *Adagio* ends is via a chain of dissonances that Keller compares to Frescobaldi's *toccate di ligature e durezze*, transforming seamlessly to the *Grave* section,

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[14] An alternative dating of Toccata in D Minor (BWV 565) is given by the late 1750s. See Williams, Peter. *The Organ Music of J. S. Bach*. Cambridge University Press, 2003.
[15] Keller, Hermann, and Helen Hewitt. *The Organ Works of Bach: A Contribution to Their History, Form, Interpretation and Performance*. C.F. Peters Corp, 1967. All subsequent references to Keller refer to this source.
[16] David, Hans T., et al. *The New Bach Reader: A Life of Johann Sebastian Bach in Letters and Documents*. W.W. Norton, 1998.
[17] See 16

which after a short two-bar flourish, comes forward with a highly dissonant huge diminished seventh chord, to which Keller cites the influence of Bruhns's Prelude in E Minor. The fugue subject is thematically associated with the material from the beginning section of the toccata. Also very typical of a fugue in STPH works is the sheer length of the subject, expanding to nine bars total.

The Toccata and Fugue in D Minor (BWV 565) is one of Bach's most famous organ pieces. In the short span of mm. 1-30, Bach takes us through all possible forms and mutations of STPH passageworks, including homophonic *Prestissimo* triplets, arpeggiated C-Sharp diminished seventh chord with an additional flat ninth on the pedal (m. 2), free flourishes, fermata suspensions, and descending arpeggios and broken chords (mm 16-21). The fugue is not a very strict one——although it is a four-part fugue, at most times only two or three voices appear, and not without unusually long free episodes characterized by imitation. The fugal subject is once again taken directly from the beginning figure of the toccata. The third part, the *Recitativo*, begins with the B-flat major cadence, followed by frequent changes in tempo and rhythmic idea, as if the composer has not made up his mind yet. The Toccata and Fugue in D Minor is like a gallery with STPH elements put on display; so many STPH ideas are squeezed compactly into this nine-minute piece of work.

To Krummacher, "no other work of Bach's reflects the *stylus phantasticus* so unmistakable as the Toccata in E". It's hard not to agree with the statement. The dating of the Toccata in E Major (BWV 566) is around Bach's famous trip to Lübeck. Indeed, both Krummacher and Keller recognize the predominant Buxtehudian influence in this piece. Its original title, *Präludium concertatum, Preludio con fantasia, et al.*, gives away its multipartite structural plan. Two pedal features of the introductory toccata are worth noting: the octave pedal note

(mm. 5-7), and the four-bar pedal solo that immediately follows, playing zigzagging semiquavers echoing the beginning manual solo, not unlike the beginning of the Bruhns' Praeludium in E Minor. The subject of the first fugue uses the stylistic device called *repercussio*, that is, with repeated notes that signifies the playful and lively nature typical of the fugues in STPH works. The Prelude and Fugue in G Major (BWV 541), Fantasy and Fugue in C Minor (BWV 537), and Buxtehude's Praeludium in A Minor (BuxWV 153) all use *repercussio* fugue themes. But different from Buxtehude or other North German precursors, Bach's theme is so much more expansive. In fact, as Keller analyzed carefully, the subject is developed from combined thematic material from the introductory toccata in m. 1 and mm. 27-28. After a short free interlude featuring interrupted flourishes, we are turned to the second fugue, which again transforms the *repercussio* beginning of the subject of the first fugue into a new subject, but this time in triple meter. Two fugues in different time signatures reminds us of the Bruhns Praeludium in E Minor.

An important feature of STPH is its mixture of different styles. To see how this applies to the second fugue, we refer to Widor, who famously claimed that "it begins like a fugue, becomes a chorale, and ends like a concerto."[18] There is no clear-cut division between the fugue and the free coda; the transition is smooth. The three-bar pedal solo indicates that we have entered the free realm, but even before that we see chorale-like passages on the left hand and pedal with thirty-second notes on the right hand, which do not belong to the fugue proper.

**The Fantasy and Fugue in A Minor (BWV 561)**

The Fantasy and Fugue in A Minor (BWV 561) is another excellent, almost "excessive" demonstration of the North German STPH. The authorship of the piece is in doubt, and

[18] See Footnote 15

people have attributed it to Kerbs or Kittle. It's hard not to agree with Keller when he describes the piece as an ostentatious and rather colorless imitation of Bach. We observe the STPH qualities to resonate nonstop throughout the whole piece. Right from the beginning, a flow of arpeggio is accompanied by a long pedal point in the tonic. After a short break at m. 11, the restless arpeggio starts again filling every inch of space. It ventures through some rather chromatic passages, going up and down in sequence. The fuge starts with a long theme that can be broken down into four phrases and contains elements reminiscent of the arpeggios that span the fantasie. The texture of the fugue remains simple and transparent, unlike those very dense and involved ones that Bach would write later in his career. Shortly after, the fugue ends in the exact same pattern of rising and falling arpeggios commencing the fantasie. The ratio of the fantasie, fugue, and free coda is roughly 1:1:1, so despite the name, "fantasia and fugue", which suggests a paired design, the piece really follows the structure of North German organ toccatas. Pedal point dominantes the introduction and the free coda. The arpeggio, though improvisatory, offers little ingenuity as the prolonged sequential movement gets boring after being repeated multiple times. In fact, the fantasie is nothing but arpeggio moving in sequence. In most other STPH works of Bach and Buxtehude, we see those arpeggio fillers as a bridge that connects to more interesting materials, such as dissonant chords, forming so-called "interrupted cadence", or contrapuntal, dense chorales, as in Buxtehude's Praeludium in F-Sharp Minor. We see a lack of balance between the free and the restrained in this piece, and that's what led Keller and others to question the authorship.

**Miscellaneous**

One of the key qualities of STPH, the"dramatische", has never been brought to such height in the fantasies of Fantasy & Fugue in G Minor (BWV 542) and Fantasy in G Major (BWV 572). To say that the dissonance in these works is daring would be an understatement. In the

great fantasy of G minor, we see contrasting alternation between the fantastic cadenza (A) and slower contrapuntal passages (B), each with its own themes. The main feature of the theme group (A) is the poignant leap in sixth, often in imitative groups, while theme (B) is defined by a typical four-note "cross" figure. To make the narration even more dramatic, Bach adds pauses after some of the most harmonically stretched chords to create the illusion of none-resolution. Similar such pauses are added in the fugue in G major (BWV 541) (m. 71) and the aforementioned iconic Fantasy in G Major (end of *Gravement*), where he tricks the listeners into believing that the piece has come to a glorious end in G major but instead they are confronted with a C-sharp diminished seventh. In the prelude in G major (BWV 541) Winsemius[19] noticed the extreme improvisatory character. The broken-chord scales, which in earlier North German works appear only as an introduction before the main body, run through the whole piece, but in a more ingenious way compared to the Fantasy and Fugue in A Minor (BWV 561). Winsemius also remarked that those dissonances would have sounded almost unbearable at the time in the church Bach worked at due to its acoustics. Another very dissonant moment is the chord at the end of the fugue (m. 139) of the Prelude and Fugue in A Minor (BWV 543), which declares the start of the free coda.

From the analysis of all the pieces above, we observe that a greater proportion of Bach's early works fit into the STPH category along the same lines as Buxtehude and Bruhns, compared to his later ones. Many of those pieces discussed, such as two of the three toccatas, were written during his Arnstad period from 1703 to 1707, while some other ones were written during the early Weimar years. This is no strange coincidence since it was at those early years that Bach was still heavily influenced by masters whom he learned from. Most notably, Bach took a trip to Lübeck, allegedly on foot, in order to listen to the famous organist of St. Mary's Church

[19] "Winsemius on Bach Prelude and fugue in G major BWV 541." *YouTube,* uploaded by Netherlands Bach Society, 27 Oct 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U8TdvbLV_bM.

there, Dietrich Buxtehude. He stayed for almost a quarter of a year before returning to Arnstadt. This was recorded in the obituary written by his son CPE Bach, who also remarked in the obituary that "he [Bach] took the works of Bruhns, Reinken, Buxtehude, and several good French organists as models". That might explain the French title "Pièce d'Orgue" and French tempo markings in Fantasy in G Major (BWV 572), and its affinity to de Grigny in style[20]. Many music historians, including Spitta, Keller, and Schweitzer[21], have noticed the influence of Buxtehude's style in pieces such as Fantasy in G Major. Despite the visible influence, we already notice Bach forming his own musical language. For instance, Buxtehude and earlier organists of the North German School would not venture outside the harmonic ambitus as much as Bach did, and as a consequence would not introduce as much musical drama and tension as Bach did with his outworldly dissonances. In his later years, Bach also occasionally returned to the multipartite, free toccata-fugue alternating form, such as in the great Prelude and Fugue in A Minor (BWV 543) and Fantasy and Fugue in G Minor (BWV 542), both of which were composed in the late Weimar and Köthen years. Elements in those pieces, including pedal point, movement of free passageworks, and motivic consistency between the fugue subject and the free interludes, all resemble his earlier attempts, but are more elaborate harmonically, and seem more carefully composed and less improvisatory.

## Conclusion

We have explained the definition of STPH made by musicologists before and after Bach, and investigated how accurately we can apply the term to North German toccatas and Bach's free organ works. Although we cannot be sure that Bach had in mind the term *stylus phantasticus* while composing those "fantastic" pieces (he surely could not have learned about the STPH

[20] For instance, note the similarity of the middle section of the Fantasy in G Major (BWV 572) and *Veni Creator en taille à 5* in de Grigny's Premier Livre d'Orgue. But we do not intend to go into detail into the influence of STPH in the French tradition, alas.
[21] Schweitzer, Albert, and Ernest Newman. Volume I of *J. S. Bach*. Macmillan, 1962.

in Mattheson's sense as it was introduced much later), Bach certainly was heavily influenced by the style and approach of STPH compositions of Buxtehude and Bruhns, and works of Buxtehude and Bruhns fit nicely into Mattheson's definition of the term.

Before concluding, we would also like to mention a few potential directions for further investigation that might be interesting. There might be a rhetorical and narrative perspective to these STPH pieces. Collins[22] discussed the style's relationship to rhetoric, and as example, Lena Jacobsen[23] gave a careful examination of the musical rhetorics of Buxtehude's organ preludes. We see that for instance, many STPH works begin with a call-to-attention statement, that is, the "Exordium". The interludes and fugues can be viewed as conflicting proposals ("Proposito") and rebuttals ("Confutatio"). Further analysis should be done to elucidate the unique rhetoric of STPH. In STPH works not limited to organ, Butt[24] pinpointed the possibility of conveying concrete emotions and stories with STPH. He included Bach's "Capriccio on the departure of a beloved brother" (BWV 992), Schmelzer's "Lamentation on the death of Ferdinand III", and Kuhnau's Biblical Sonatas as examples. The STPH pieces in the North German organ tradition, as far as we know, are mostly absolute music.

We also noticed an abundance of Bach's works in the fantastic style written for keyboard[25] that have their origin in the works of the same type composed by Weckman, Merulo, and Frescobaldi. The influence extended beyond keyboard music though. For instance, the lavish ornamentations in the beginning of Fantasy and Fugue in G Minor (BWV 542) is very typical

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[22] Collins, Paul. *The Stylus Phantasticus and Free Keyboard Music of the North German Baroque*. Ashgate, 2005.
[23] Jacobson, Lena. "Musical Rhetoric in Buxtehude's Free Organ Works", the Organ Yearbook XIII (1982), 60-79
[24] Butt, John 1995. 'Germany and the Netherlands.' Keyboard Music before 1700. Edited by Alexander Silbiger. New York: Schirmer.
[25] Readers interested may consult Schulenberg, David. *The Keyboard Music of J.S. Bach*. Schirmer Books ; Maxwell Macmillan Canada ; Maxwell Macmillan International, 1992.

of Merulo's and Frescobaldi's Italian keyboard toccatas. Most famous example is the Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue in D Minor (BWV 903), which would actually be a strong candidate for the narrative reading of STPH, since it was written during the death of Bach's first wife, Maria Barbara. Also notable are the *manuliter* toccatas (BWV 910-916), which like the organ pieces, were also early works of Bach. Mattheson must have also had these keyboard works in mind when he made his definition of STPH. There is also a rich tradition of STPH string repertoire of the Viennese and Salzburg courts that goes back to Farina, Schmelzer, and Biber. Finally, it would be worthwhile to inquire about how later composers revived and transformed the STPH tradition built upon Bach and the North German School. Mozart's Fantasy in D Minor, Liszt's Fantasy and Fugue on B-A-C-H, and Busoni's dazzling *Fantasia contrappuntistica* all bear considerable resemblance to Bach's STPH in spirit. Alas, we do not have time to go into detail about any of these.

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