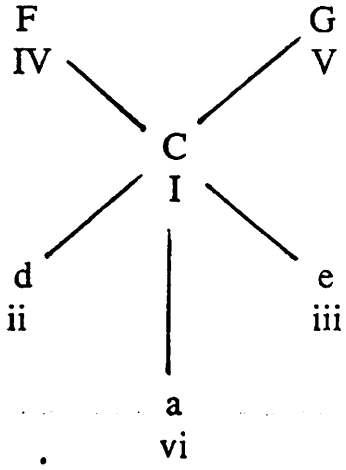
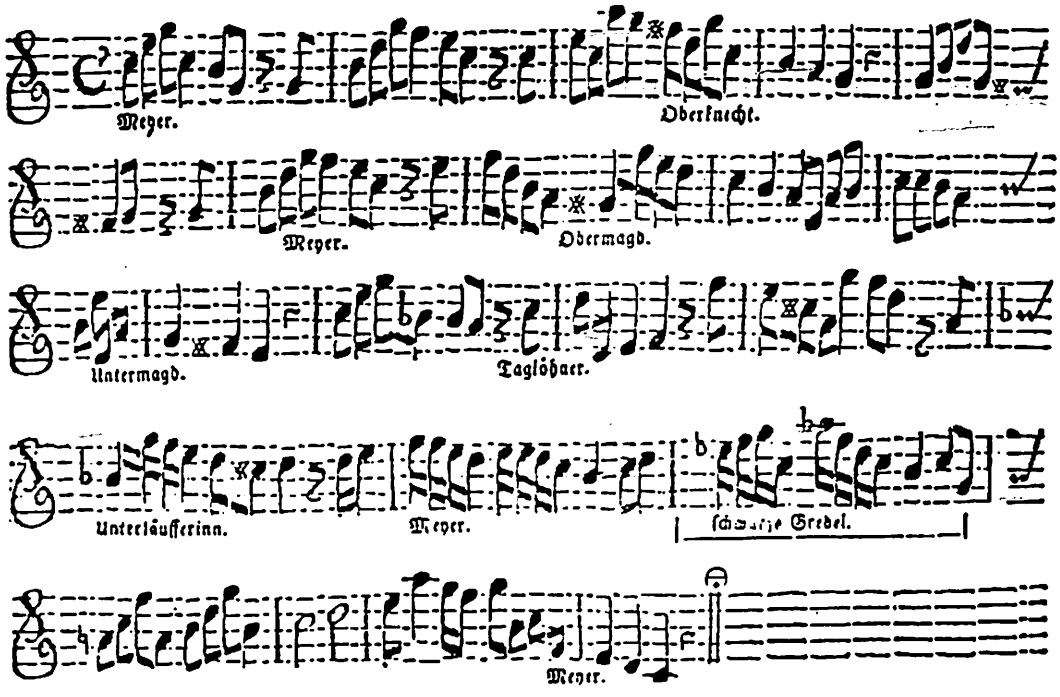
Central ["solar"] arrangement of keys



Key schemes
(Riepel, *Grundregeln*, 1755)

Taking C to be the tonic (I):

C (I) = *Meyer* (landowner, farmer-master)
G (V) = *Oberknecht* (chief servant)
a (vi) = *Obermagd* (chief maid)
e (iii) = *Untermagd* (second or kitchen maid)
F (IV) = *Taglohner* (day laborer)
d (ii) = *Unterläufferin* (female interloper, or a female worker in the salt factory)
c (i) = *schwarze Gredel* ("black Margaret," a nickname for a Swedish queen as swarthy as a man)



Affects associated with keys by Johann Mattheson (1739)

D minor, the tono primo (Dorian) is believed by Mattheson to be somewhat devout and calm, at the same time grand, agreeable, and expressive of contentment. He therefore recommends it for the furthering of devotion in the church and for achieving peace of mind in communi vita. He does not wish to imply, however, that this key cannot also delight; nevertheless, "skipping music" must not be written in it whereas "flowing" music will be very successful.

G minor (transposed Dorian) is "almost the most beauiful key." Mattheson finds in it not only the rather serious character of D minor combined with spirited loveliness, but also uncommon grace and complaisance. "It is suitable for tender as well as refreshing things, for yearning as well as happy ones. In short, it lends itself well and flexibly to moderate plaintiveness and tempered gaiety."

A minor (Aeolian) is found by Mattheson to be somewhat plaintive, dignifies and relaxed. "It is sleep-inducing but not disagreeably so. It is highly suitable for keyboard and other instrumental compositions."

E minor (Phrygian), says Mattheson, can hardly be considered gay. "Whatever one may do with it, it will remain pensive, profound, sad, and expressive of grief; in such a way, however, that some chance of consolation remains."

To C major (Ionian) Mattheson ascribes a rather rude and impertinent character, but says that it is suited to the expression of joy. "A clever composer who chooses the accompanying instruments well can even use it for tender and charming compositions."

F major (transposed Ionian) "is capable of expressing the most beautiful sentiments, whether these be generosity, steadfastness, love or whatever else may be high on the list of virtues. It is natural and unforced when used to express such affects." He compares it to a handsome person who looks good whatever he may do and who has, "as the French say, bonne grace."

D major is found to be somewhat sharp and stubborn, very suitable to noisy, gay, war-like, and cheering things. "No one will deny, however, that if a flute is used instead of a clarinet and a violin is the predominant instrument instead of the kettledrum, it can very well by used for delicate things."

G major (Hypoionian) Mattheson calls insinuating and persuasive. It is, besides, somewhat brilliant and suited to the expression of serious as well as gay effects.

C minor "possesses both exceeding loveliness and, at the same time, sadness. Since the first quality is too prevalent and one easily gets tired of too much sweetness, it will be best to enliven this key to a somewhat spirited and regular movement. This will keep its mildness from becoming soporific. If, of course, it is intended to induce sleep, this consideration does not apply."

F minor was felt by Mattheson to be mild and relaxed, yet at the same time profound and heavy with despair and fatal anxiety. It is very moving, says Mattheson, in its beautiful expression of black, helpless melancholy which occasionally causes the listener to shudder.

B-flat major (transposed Lydian) "is very diverting and showy, however, somewhat modest. It thus can pass as both magnificent and delicate." Mattheson agrees with Kircher, who says that it elevates the soul to more arduous things.

Mattheson considers E-flat major to express the opposite of lasciviousness, it being rather pathetic, always serious, and plaintive.

A major "is very touching, although it is somewhat brilliant. It is best suited to the expression of plaintive and sad passions rather than to divertissements. It is especially good for the violin."

E major is found to express desperate or fatal sadness. "Under certain circumstances it can be piercing, sorrowful, and penetrating." He compares it to the "fatal separation of body and soul."

B minor is, according to Mattheson, seldom used because it is bizarre, moody, and melancholy.

F-sharp minor, "although it leads to great sadness, is somewhat languid and amorous rather than lethal. It is also somewhat abandoned, singular, and misanthropic."

Beyond Passion:
The Inner Quest of J. S. Bach

Peter Pesic*

Johann Sebastian Bach stands as the central and greatest composer of the Western tradition not only because of his individual masterworks but also because he unites and synthesizes the two strands of that tradition, the ancient and the modern. The dialogue between these two musics, between the ancient and the modern, is, I believe, the central question about music that commends itself to thoughtful persons. There are many other places in the world where other great works and questions are also addressed, where Plato or Shakespeare are read. There are very few other places besides St. John's College in Santa Fe where this central question about the nature and destiny of music is cherished. In this dialogue Bach occupies a unique place as mediator. His works are the fount of irreplaceable insights.

In his time Bach considered intently both these strands. He was an unequalled master of expressivity, of the complex art of moving the passions which is the heart of what I will call "modern" music (following the names given by Vincenzo Galilei and Claudio Monteverdi about 1600). Bach is the master of modulation, who set out his two-fold exposition of all the major and minor keys in the two books of *Well-Tempered Keyboard* as if to survey systematically the artistic possibilities of the complete range of keys. He is also the master of chromatic art, of the use of the semitone and of dissonance to yield an unlimited palette of expressive effects. In each prelude and fugue of the *Well-Tempered Keyboard* Bach has given voice to an endlessly varied series of separate moods, from most darkly brooding to the most exuberant. He knows our joy and our pain, and has given each unforgettable form. This is the passionate side of Bach that was embraced by Schumann and the other Romantics who took him for an exemplar of expressivity. Thus Schumann, Mendelssohn, and Chopin worshipped Bach as an arch-contemporary. However, at the time of his death in 1750 Bach was considered by his own contemporaries as a conservative, a master of an old-fashioned polyphonic art. This opinion was held even by Bach's second son, Carl Philipp Emmanuel, whose own music fell clearly into the galant style fashionable at the time, and of which he (and his brother Johann Christian, the "London Bach") were the exemplars that so influenced Haydn and Mozart.

To his Romantic students Bach was the master who held the keys of untrammeled expressivity, the one who could teach them how to pour out their ardent souls. But he was much more for them; he was the master of counterpoint, whose "old-fashioned" polyphonic art was to them new and startling. Here we reach the heart of the ancient practice of music: it is fundamentally calm and tranquil, not passionate, as befits the music of the spheres and the immensities of the starry sky. It strives for an ecstasy that sweeps the soul beyond the endless ebb and flow of passion to a hidden, radiant center. One does not know what ancient Greek

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music sounded like -- only a few fragments have survived -- but this calm music found its touchstone in the Gregorian chants, which turn not towards word-painting but an austerely beautiful unfolding of the ancient modes. Notably, these modes lack the insistent leading-tone (the raised seventh degree of the scale) that is a prominent part of the modern scales. After the fateful shift to polyphonic music, numbers of great masters carried on the practice of the *stile antico*, as it came to be called, notably Josquin, Palestrina, Tallis, Byrd, Gibbons, to name only a partial list. For indeed Bach was steeped in the *stile antico*, whose calm austerity was a touchstone of his own art.[1] Bach had a remarkable private collection of earlier polyphonic masters such as Palestrina and Caldara, whose works he also copied and adapted for contemporary performances. There are several works in which Bach employed the strict practice of the *stile antico*; the E major fugue from Book II of the *Well-Tempered Keyboard*, several chorale settings from the *Clavier-Übung* Part III, and several movements from the *Symbolum Nicenum* of the B Minor Mass, where he uses this strict art to set the crucial words from the Nicene Creed: "I believe in one God" as well as "I confess one baptism". [Example: "Credo in unum Deum" from the Mass in B Minor, BWV 232^{II}] Clearly he considered the *stile antico* the rightful vehicle for the deepest assertions of faith. No less important is the way he tempered and changed the elevation of *stile antico* in his other counterpuntal practice, in which he profoundly blended the ancient topics of polyphonic ecstasy and intense expressivity.

Bach's settings of the Passion Gospels are crucial instances of this singular synthesis. Their immediate intent was liturgical; the St. Matthew Passion was written to be performed during the Good Friday services of April 15, 1729 in Bach's church, the Thomaskirche in Leipzig. As such, his Passion setting forms part of a long tradition that includes austere Gregorian intonations by a few solo voices of the Gospel text; this tradition mutes the dramatic quality of the confrontation of the characters by relying on simple and unemphatic Gregorian melodies. Bach's setting moves radically away from this austerity, emphasizing the overwhelming intensity of the text and its emotional import. Not only is the Gospel declaimed with intense expressivity, employing both solo voices as well as two choirs and orchestras, but Bach also adds arias which comment and amplify on the reaction of the individual soul to the shattering events of the sacred story. These virtuosic individual utterances are in turn enclosed by chorales, which take melodies familiar to the congregagion and treats them with consummate art, so that the onlookers are themselves swept to the center of the action. Significantly, the duration of this immense work is close to the canonical time required by the crucifixion itself, the three hours that lead to the "ninth hour," three o'clock in the afternoon of Good Friday.

More than a representation, Bach's Passion aims to be something more like an overwhelming re-enactment of the sufferings of the Redeemer in "real time": the work of art erupts into the sacred drama it presents, making it vivid and present once again. Bach chooses this extraordinarily proactive approach in order to galvanize the torpid souls of his hearers, which include the sleepy souls of all who later heard it, most especially our own. He is a defiant practitioner of an art of musical rhetoric that considered (in Francis Bacon's words) that "the horse is not to be accounted the less of which will not do well without the spur" (*Colours of*

Good and Evil [1597], Works 7.80). In this view, our souls remain dull until they are strongly spurred by appeals to imagination. Not only our dullness require these strong measures, but even more our hypocrisy and self-satisfaction calls for vigorous medicine. With radical fervor Bach confronts the complacent burghers of Leipzig with the outrageous vision of themselves as a savage mob, howling for the death of Jesus. He surrounds them with a double chorus that sings alternately the most heart-rending threnodies and the most vicious blood-lust. It is no wonder that one old lady (about whom I often think) walked out scandalized, voicing her disgust at what she called "an opera-comedy" usurping the sacred precincts in its most solemn hour.

Bach himself was deeply interested in theology and had in his library a considerable collection of theological works. He knew that the conventional professions of believers readily conceal hypocrisy and lukewarm faith; he aimed for nothing less than a conversion of the souls of his hearers that would transform their beings from pious externality to deep inner conviction. His rhetorical practice harks back to Plato and Aristotle's treatments of this problem. The philosopher must at last also become a true rhetorician if he wants not only to offer the truth to his hearers but also to move their souls to embrace it. Rhetoric, as the art of persuasion, opens the door between reason and imagination and invites the hearer to step through. Music augments the power of words by appealing even more directly to the soul.

It is not merely that our souls are so sleepy, so dimly aware of larger realities, although that is surely true. Even when we acknowledge certain truths, our natural response lacks fervor. Bach's younger contemporary Johann Mattheson, an important writer on musical rhetoric, asserted in 1739 that "where there is no passion or affect, there is no virtue. When our passions are ill they must be healed, not murdered." The mere awareness of correct behavior does not suffice to make us truly virtuous, for we tend to lack courage to act with the needed intensity. Here one thinks of the much older statement by the Abbot Suger of St. Denis: "The dull soul is raised to the sight of God by beautiful things." Suger was writing in the early Middle Ages, in a time when recurrent waves of iconoclasm called for the abolition of all images and the chastising of artistic liberty in favor of severe simplicity. In contrast, he felt that art was not a false idol but a legitimate path by which the soul might reach towards the divine. Bach surely shared this conviction, but went much further. The soul is not only ravished by the sweetness of art, but even more to be purged and purified by extreme use of dissonance, by the evocation of the most harrowing affects.

It is just here that the interplay between ancient and modern emerges most strongly in Bach, for he mixes these two divergent approaches in a remarkable way. True, he appeals constantly to the most powerful effects of chromatic musical art, but he embeds this in a much larger framework that reaches beyond the ebb and swell of passionate reaction. The result is that the soul is not merely tossed to and fro, helpless, but gradually begins to track larger, calmer realities that give it a solid place to land and orient itself anew. This process begins with the very first notes of the work, the celebrated double chorus of the Daughters of Zion. As with Monteverdi's *L'Orfeo*, the central vocation of the musical soul is to learn to lament, whether the bitter fate of Euridice or the sufferings of the Bridegroom in the Passion. A lament is, first

of all, an outcry from the depths. Bach uses for this purpose a simple arpeggio as the initial gesture of an immense flood of melody [Example: First choral entrance of No. 1]. The power of the arpeggiated tonic chord of e energizes the complex unfolding of the melodic line, always sinuous, turning and re-turning. The whole impression is turbulent, altogether consistent with the impassioned questioning of the *turba*, the crowd. As Albert Schweitzer observed, it is as if one were watching Jesus carry His cross through the turbulent streets, painfully mounting each step in the way. Of course, Bach's dramatic stroke here is to plunge the hearer into the midst of the drama, even before it has begun -- an audacious, modernistic flash-forward. But something far calmer and simpler grounds this immensely complex movement, and Bach discloses it in its very first measures [Example: opening measures of No. 1] The throbbing bass line, like a pounding heartbeat, already inflames the dark atmosphere. Harmonically, the bass holds a pedal point on low E, the tonic, insisting with immovable strength for 5 long measures. In contrast, the upper voices move in a confusing mass, studded with many secondary dominant. One's first impression remains turbulent and troubling, seemingly impenetrable and obscurely complicated. Only very gradually does one realize that there is a simple outline darkly radiant in the contorted melody: an ascending *E major* scale. This is extraordinary, since the prevalent harmonies insist on e *minor*. One is pulled, then, both towards the major and the minor.

Among the tumult of the minor harmonies the E major scale rises slowly, barely perceptible but unmistakable. Out of the darkness emerges this ascending scale, and one remembers Bach's word for scale, *scala*, used in his terse notes to teach his students the elements of figured bass. He could not have missed the connection of this *scala* to the *scala sancta*, the "holy steps" traditionally denoting the Way of the Cross, the rising path taken by Jesus in Jerusalem as He bore His cross. Bach uses the simplest scales throughout the Passion both because of their musical primality and in order to symbolize Jesus agonizing ascent of Golgotha as well as the parallel steps other humans must take to follow Him. There is a similar fundamental quality to the other masterstroke of this opening number, the radiant apparation of a separate choir (drawn from the two) soaring above the others singing the ancient chorale melody "O Lamm Gottes unschuldig" [O guiltless Lamb of God] [Example: First appearance of the chorale in No. 1]. This chorale -- doubtless familiar to his whole audience -- relies on the simplest motives, skips of a fifth or scales, as it emerges from the world of Gregorian chant. Most importantly, the chorale is firmly established in G major, so that a third key is added to the peculiar intertwining of E minor and major. These keys are all concordant, so that no discord is sounded, but the hearer is suddenly aware both of their multiple relations and of their mysterious unity. Here E minor is juxtaposed with its two closest related major keys, the relative major G and the parallel major E. The question of their true relation is left suspended; the verses move at times towards G but at last turn back to E, giving the E major triad at the end, following the custom of the *tierce de Picardy*, Bach's frequent use of the parallel major triad to end a piece in the minor.

Standing back to look at the whole work, Bach's larger tonal design remains mysterious. His procedures are less transparent than Mozart's (for instance), who begins and ends the *Magic Flute* in E-flat, as if the whole opera were in the key, on the grand scale. It is true that Bach

ends Part I of the Passion with the great chorale fantasia on *O Mensch, bewein dein Sünde gross* in E major, as if to recall the tonal complex of the beginning. But E minor and G major are absent from this movement, and I think that Bach has a different larger design, one revealed in an often-noticed passage. During the account of Peter's vow never to abandon Jesus Bach inserts two settings of the Passion Chorale, identical in their melodies and harmonies but exactly a half-step apart. The first setting addresses the shepherd of men's souls in E major (No. 21), and with childlike faith praises the divine giver of "milk and sweetmeats", asking for His favor and protection; then follows Jesus' prophecy of the cock crowing thrice, and Peter's angry disavowal; finally the second setting of the chorale in E-flat asks to remain with the Lord "even if Thy heart is breaking." This second setting is cognizant of Jesus' prophecy, of death and abandonment; it ends with the image of the dying Jesus lying in the arms of the believers, as if forming a kind of *Pietà*. With shock the believers understand that their divine protector lies helpless in their arms. The contemplation of Peter's unknowingness has deepened the singing of the very same chorale, causing it to sink half a tone.

This is, I think, the clue to the larger design. The whole Passion ends with the great threnody over the tomb of Jesus, in C minor, which turns towards E-flat major in its middle section. It is as if the whole work were to have sunk half a tone from beginning to end, from E to E-flat, a gigantic chromatic sigh. But, more than merely an expressive gesture of grief, this downward shift -- so small in one way, so great in another -- is the outward symbol of the deepening inwardness of faith. This inwardness rises as the soul sinks under the impact of the events of the Passion, as if the tonal descent were itself a kind of purification and death. The rising and falling scales that Bach uses throughout the work with such subtle prominence are not only the symbols of this mingled ascent and fall; they are the very way in which the soul literally experiences these things in the realm of music.

Operating by faith rather than by any rigid formula, Bach applies these insights throught the Passion to inform the smallest as well as the largest moments. Consider, for instance, the first aria, "Buss und Reu," which begins with a falling chromatic line that shows the soul sinking under the load of penance and remorse [Example: first vocal entrance of No. 10]. Compare, then, the even deeper realizations of the aria "Erbarme dich, mein Gott" (No. 47). The heartbreaking interval of the rising minor sixth is taken from the moment in which the Evangelist announces the third crowing of the cock, and the weeping of Peter. This interval is the generating impulse of the aria; as it reaches upward, it subsides into falling scales (always foreshadowed and confirmed by reverberant scales in the bass line). Peter hears a sound, a song, the rising crow of the cock -- sung both by Jesus and the Evangelist -- and the song of betrayal and redemption enters his soul. On one level, this is the perfect representation of broken weeping, a lamentation that has at last confronted itself as the source and cause of its miseries. It reaches upward again and again, only to fall backward ever more brokenly. It seems as if the falling scales are the justest bearers of its ravaged state. Yet the final gesture of this broken line is, most daringly, an unbroken scale that ascends by whole tones, rising a whole octave, from D to D [Example: m. 21], boldly grasping the tritone D-G#-D as its very center. It as if in its greatest desolation -- that of realizing its own ultimate complicity with

evil -- the soul is opened to a rising force that contains and conquers the greatest dissonance, the *diabolus in musica*, the tritone that shadows every scale.

These motives of descent and ascent also have harmonic implications. The ascending lines usually invoke raised leading tones that point in the direction of the dominant, of the more sharped keys. Contrariwise, the descending lines use flats that move towards the subdominant, and the more flatted keys. Bach relishes the symbolic import of these moves, as well as their pervasive constructive importance. After all, in the same naive way indicated above, a sharp (♯) is a kind of cross, and a flat (♭) a representation of softness. The "hardness" and "softness" of these symbols is emphasized in the German language, which drew from Latin the designations *dur* (hard, meaning natural or raised, as in B♮ called in German H) and *moll* (soft, meaning the softened or flatted B♭ called in German simply B) and which came to indicate then major and minor respectively. Bach also cherished the realization that his own name spelled out four notes, B-A-C-H, that include both the hard and soft B, as if in his family name (the name of generations of musicians in Saxony) were an image of chromatic art. What is more, Bach considered that if one regards the shape of his name in music both the melody it sounds and the diagonal positioning of the notes against each other form an image of the cross. I think that Bach used sharped key signatures to signalize the crucifixatory events (as when the crowds fugally call out "Let him be crucified" in successively more and more sharped keys, culminating in B major (5 sharps)) (No. 54). "Buss und Reu" is in f# minor (2 sharps); "Erbarme dich" itself is in B minor (2 sharps), as if to indicate the way Peter's self-realization is a kind of *via crucis*.

Conversely, the arias that move towards a kind of tranquil deepening of the soul tend to move towards the flatted keys, as in the bass aria "Mache dich, mein Herze, rein" (No. 75, in B♭) or the alto aria "Sehet, Jesus hat die Hand" (No. 70, in E♭), not to speak of the final chorus. Poised between these two tonal realms, and gazing both ways, are the great arias in a and d, "Aus Liebe will mein Heiland sterben" (No. 58) and "Komm, susse Kreutz" (No. 66). Here one should remember that, with respect to the major keys, minor keys always lie in the flattened or subdominant direction; C minor lies three flats "lower" than C major in the sense that the minor key borrows the three flats of E-flat major. Thus the prevalent use of the minor keys throughout the Passion also emphasizes the sense of descent. Likewise, the St. John Passion begins in G minor and ends in C minor, a fifth lower. Still, the larger question remains: descent to what? If indeed the work is sinking down from E to E-flat that leaves unresolved the true center of the work. That is, although the Passion is in many respects amazingly finished, tonally it lacks closure. Bach could not have been unaware of this crucial feature, for in his other works he emphasizes the centrality of one key. For instance, the Easter cantata *Christ lag in Todesbanden* (BWV 4) is almost entirely in E minor, with one triumphant cadence to E major. The B minor mass (BWV 232) remains resolutely within that key, turning only to its relative major. The *Christmas Oratorio* and the *Magnificat* center around the jubilant strains of D major. The Third Part of the *Clavier-Übung*, the setting of the Luteran Catechism, begins and ends in E-flat, with a strong Trinitarian sense of the three flats in that key; the concluding fugue (known in English-speaking countries as the "St. Anne" Fugue) is a musical portrait of the Trinity, since it is a triple fugue each of whose sections

represents musically a Person of the Trinity using the artifice of ancient counterpoint (the Father majestic, the Son humble, the Holy Spirit quickening with grace). It would have been fitting to close the Passion with such a tonal reference to the Trinity, but it does not resolve the larger question of the relation of this ending to the initial tonality of the work.

Indeed, the concept of a tonal center had a different significance for Bach and other Baroque composers than it did for the classical composers that followed them. Mozart and Beethoven tended to set the tonic in polar opposition to the dominant (or, in minor tonalities, to set the tonic minor in opposition to the relative major). This polarization in classical music has profound dramatic significance, for the shift from tonic to dominant is usually dramatized and is the source of rhetorical power. In contrast, Bach and his contemporaries thought of the tonic as more a single center, not as part of a polarized dyad tonic-versus-dominant. Leonard Ratner genially calls this the "solar" (as opposed to "polar") sense of tonality; the tonic is like a sun orbited by surrounding related keys.[2] This conception was given an amusing political formulation by a younger contemporary of Bach, the theorist Johann Riepel. In his *Grundreglen zur Tonordnung insgemein* (1755) Riepel called the tonic (say C) the "Meyer," the landowner, the farmer or master (see appendix). Then, in relation to C as center or master, the dominant G is the "Oberknecht" (chief servant), the relative minor a is the "Obermagd" (chief maid) and the mediant minor e is the "Untermagd" (second or kitchen maid). These all form the "household" of the master; just beyond the immediate household lie the subdominant F as "Taglohner" (day laborer), the minor supertonic d as "Unterläufferin" (female interloper, or perhaps a female worker in a salt factory), and finally the parallel tonic minor c as "schwarze Gredel" (black Margaret, a local nickname for a Swedish queen whose swarthiness made her look like a man). His sexist terminology of minor keys as feminine was shared by other contemporary writers as well. Riepel also gives tables showing all the permutations by which these keys might succeed each other; the main principle is that the *Meyer* be the central point of reference. He gives little examples of melodies following this prescription in which he even names the characters as they appear (see appendix). This political order is stable and centralized; the other keys do not stand in polarized opposition to the tonic-master but rather are decorously subordinant to it. As in Riepel's example, one begins and ends with the master, the tonic, paying visits to the other members of the household but always returning in between to pay due respect. This is the tonal pattern of Baroque fugues and concerti that Bach employs in many works.

When, in the Passions, this royal order is set aside one wonders all the more. It must be that the Passion is not complete, that its design points outside and beyond itself, as the events of Good Friday are not complete until the story of Easter is told. By not giving tonal closure Bach can move his hearers deeply, but not allow them to sink into a kind of endless despair, the melancholic conviction that sorrowful passion is its own ground and end. The end of the Passion is a gigantic suspension that leaves the soul waiting and expectant. One thinks of the Easter Oratorio that Bach had already written before the Matthew Passion, in 1725; this work, like Bach's other great outpourings of religious joy, is centered in D major. It seems possible to me that Bach was creating at the end of the Matthew Passion a suspended E-flat (or a hovering C, if you consider the minor tonic more fundamental) meant to resolve on Easter

Morning to the strains of D major. Interestingly, the Easter Oratorio is not wholly consecrated to joy. After the initial outburst of orchestral joy -- without any voices, it should be noted -- in D major Bach inserts a meditative adagio in B minor for oboe and strings, a movement that might have been found in a Passion; it is in the very key of "Erbarme dich," in fact. He clearly does not want joy to deny the deepening inwardness gained through the Passion, no more than will he allow grief to deny the joy to come. The subsequent movements of the Easter Oratorio review the grief and confusion of the disciples and the women in the darkness before Easter. Tonally, however, they are all held within the larger frame of D. The effect of the whole is (in Janet Lewis' words) "to bind joy and despair into a larger whole" but one finally marked by a serenity purified of vain illusion.

As exciting and interesting as passion is for humans, each individual passion is transient. Artistically, the stronger the evocation of a particular passion, the more it exhausts the sensibility of the hearer, whose response may flag or even become bored unless that passion merge into another, different passion. Monotony is the death of expressivity; the performer must ever seek to renew, to quicken the emotional impulse, or else leave his hearers cold. Yet there is something deeply unsatisfying in this endless round of passion that leads from joy to despair, to anger, to sorrow, and in the end to a kind of passionate exhaustion. Each passion wants a kind of eternity, as Nietszche wrote, but also is moving towards something else, to some other passion, forever unsatisfied. The only passion that does not ultimately stale is a passion to transcend passion, if I might put it paradoxically. The divine stillness stands as goal and ground of human striving.

Bach understood this ultimate limitation of passion as well as he fathomed the expressive force of each passion in itself. So while he has us live in a rich cosmos of varied moods he always has in mind a transcendent vanishing point of the passions, as it were. And, I submit, the ancient practice of music, the *stile antico,* was for him the musical expression of this trans-human limit that, even if rarely heard in its entire purity, just for that reason shapes and guides the *stile moderno* in its passionate quest. As one follows Bach's artistic and personal journey in the years following the Passion one sees the way he followed the path of the ancient art of music towards ever more intricately wrought masterpieces of polyphony. This deeper shaping informs especially the crucial project of Bach's last decade, the *Art of Fugue.* From the endless invention of variegated themes Bach turned instead to a single theme whose contrapuntal possibility he pursued to the limit. It was for him, I think, the ultimate synthesis of *stile antico* and *stile moderno*, of the human and the divine.

It is significant that this single theme is in D minor; Bach and Mattheson often associate this modern key with the ancient Dorian mode (*tono primo*, which Mattheson also calls the "first key") whose final note is D. Although Bach is definitely writing in the modern minor mode, it is as if he wishes to hew as closely as he can to the traces of the most ancient and primal mode he knows. In contrast to the tonal sinking of the Passion, in this immense work Bach remains completely consistent with the tonality of D, arraying around this center all other tonalities in complex arrays. From the very first fugue in this work Bach shows the hieratic radiance with which the theme can superimpose over itself in manifold patterns. There is a

subtle dialectic between the austerity of the beginning of the theme, a rising fifth followed by the falling notes of the D minor triad, and the expressive possibilities of its ending, a scalar passage that rises and falls, and includes both possible semitones of D minor. [Example: Contrapunctus I from the *Art of Fugue*] In this work, however, expression always turns towards immense structures of resolution, increasingly in the sequence of fugues that follow and that build ever more complex combinations of the theme, its inverse, its diminuitions and augmentations. At the very end, Bach synthesized that theme with a related, flowing second theme and with the musical letters of his own name, B-A-C-H. The manuscript breaks off at just that point, with Carl Phillip Emmanuel's superscription that at that point the composer had died. His heirs appended to this mighty fragment the chorale "Vor Deinen Thron' tret ich hiermit," as if to signal Bach's approach to the divine presence.[3] I think that this huge outpouring of D minor might be the true resolution of the chromatic sinking of the Passion. Perhaps even as he wrote the Passion Bach understood that it called for an immense answer, a work that would meet the claims of passionate expressivity by an equally imposing statement of the overarching order of polyphonic art.

Though it is intended to be read at a keyboard instrument, Bach clearly intended the *Art of Fugue* not as a work to be performed in the ordinary sense. An hour and a half of music entirely in D minor is perhaps more than can be heard by most audiences in one sitting, or more than can be convincingly performed under ordinary circumstances. It was written to be read at the keyboard, perhaps with a friend peering over one's shoulder, in the inwardness of the intent soul. Most of all, the student is being initiated into the deepest levels of music, to behold that dominion in which the eternal elements of counterpoint reign above the tumult of the passions, calming and blessing the restless soul. On a manuscript sheet of one of those final countrapuntal masterpieces, the *Musical Offering*, Bach wrote: *Christus coronabit crucigeros*; Christ will crown the cross-bearers. He was describing an intricately rising sequence of canons that he was crafting, but was, I think, also expressing his own deepest hope to rise from suffering to blessedness. It may finally be that only those tempered by passion can taste that which lies beyond passion, the peace of God that passes understanding.

Notes

1. For an invaluble account of Bach's relation to the *stile antico* see Christoph Wolff, "Bach and the Tradition of the Palestrina Style" in his *Bach: Essays on his Life and Music* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), pp. 84-104.

2. See Leonard Ratner, *Classic Music* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1980), pp. 48-51.

3. Christoph Wolff takes issue with these matters as myths, but the evidence remains of Carl Phillip Emmanuel's inscription on the unfinished score; though the "deathbed chorale" is indeed quite separate from the fugues I continue to be moved by their juxtaposition.