

Music through the Microscope



J.S. Bach

Brandenburg Concerto No. 4 in G, Movement 1 [Sample]

A musical analysis

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Structure: Episode 3**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

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Structure: Ritornello 4.....**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Conclusion Ritornello 4 Structure ..**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Structure: Recapitulation**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Two bar bridge**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Recapitulation**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Conclusion Recapitulation**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Instrumentation & expression**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Terraced dynamics.....**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Rhythm.....**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Hemiola.....**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Texture**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Ritornello 1**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Episode 1**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Episode 2**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Ritornello 3**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Episode 3**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Tonality.....**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Ritornello 1**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Episode 1**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Ritornello 2**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Episode 2**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Ritornello 3**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Episode 3**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Two bar Transition.....**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Ritornello 4**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Harmony**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Ritornello 1**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

 Contrapuntally justified dissonance**Error! Bookmark not**
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Episode 1**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

 Contrapuntally justified dissonance**Error! Bookmark not**
defined.

 Sustained pitches**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Ritornello 2**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Neapolitan 6.....**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Episode 2**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Cycle of fifths**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Ritornello 3**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Episode 3**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Cycle of fifths**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Contrapuntally justified dissonance**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Cycle of fifths**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

False relations & contrapuntally justified dissonance..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Closing Episode 3.....**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Ritornello 4**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Neapolitan 6.....**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Ritornello 1 Recapitulation**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Nick Redfern.....**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

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Introduction

This document is a detailed analysis of J.S Bach's Brandenburg Concerto No. 4, Movement 1. The purpose of this analysis is to aid the study of the work by isolating aspects of structure, melody and melodic development, harmony, orchestration techniques, texture, rhythm, etc.

This study is not a critique of the composer and does not seek to explore the cultural, contextual or historical aspects of the music.

If some of the illustrations appear too small then a free copy of the illustrations can be downloaded as a PDF file from:

http://www.nickredfern.co.uk/Cloud_Factory_Publications.htm

Sources

The score from which the analysis is derived was taken from The New Anthology of Music published by Edition Peters for Edexcel. However the copyright restrictions have required me to illustrate the work from a short score transcription using Sibelius and from public domain scores downloaded from **IMSLP** at http://imslp.org/wiki/Main_Page.

Nick Redfern

The Baroque Concerto

The Concerto Grosso represents the height of compositional technique in the late Baroque period. The Concerto Grosso consists of three instrumental components: the solo or soloists, called the Concertino; the orchestra, called the Ripieno and the Continuo. The Continuo is a unique feature of the Baroque period and has no fully realised part in the score, the music being represented by a bass line. The Continuo does not have a fixed instrumentation: an instrument that can play chords is essential, and most commonly is represented by the harpsichord although organ or lute is possible. The Continuo could also include a string bass or bassoon. Here the Concertino is represented by a solo violin and two solo flutes.

The distinct features of Brandenburg Concerto

4, Movement 1

The essence of this Concerto lies in its dynamism in terms of harmony, counterpoint, structure and the inherent duality that lies between the concepts of simplicity and complexity. The simplicity of harmony and motif as expressed in the Ritornelli and the complexity is found within the solo passages which mark the Episodes. The structure in itself is simple but the relationship between each Ritornello and Episode is complex; each part of the structure until the Recapitulation is unique in terms of length, tonality and instrumental features.

The dynamism of the structure is balanced by the dynamism of the orchestration. The overt employment of terraced dynamics brings an added feature of the duality that lies between quiet and intimate; loud and vigorous. Even the metre has elements of complexity where the phrasing is undermined with structural inclusion of hemiola, tricks of the ear, where the time signature appears to have temporarily shifted. Indeed, the only true constant in this movement is the incessant and indefatigable rhythmic drive.

Compositional flux

It is possible to derive one single motto or maxim for the dramatic character of the work and that is *compositional flux*. The work is simply never allowed to repeat sections per se and so Brandenburg Concerto No. 4, Movement 1 can therefore be considered to be in a perpetual state of transformation. The *flux* will be shown to have an impact on all aspects of the Concerto.

Thematicism

The Ritornello

The Ritornello is a very powerful structural device and therefore should be readily identifiable. Here the exposition of the Ritornello reveals two distinct motifs.

Musical score for Ritornello 1, bars 1 to 6. The score includes parts for Solo Violin, Flute 1, Flute 2, and Strings & Continuo. The Solo Violin part has a simple melodic line. Flute 1 plays a sustained chord with a tremolo. Flute 2 plays an arpeggiated figure. The Strings & Continuo part provides harmonic support with chords and a bass line.

Figure 1 Ritornello 1 bar 1 to 6

The first motif, Ritornello Motif Z, is an arpeggio figure, here in flute 2, and is harmonised by the tonic and dominant triads, G and D.

Musical score for Ritornello Motifs, bars 1 to 6. The score is divided into two sections: "Ritornello Motif Z" (bars 1-3) and "Ritornello Motif" (bars 4-6). The parts are Solo Violin, Flute 1, Flute 2, and Strings & Continuo. The "Ritornello Motif Z" section highlights the arpeggiated figure in Flute 2 and its harmonic support in the strings.

Figure 2 Ritornello Motifs bar 1 to 6

The Ritornello Motif Z

Ritornello Motif Z has three very distinct components which are founded on the tonic and dominant chords, here in Ritornello 1, G major. The first component is a pair of semiquaver arpeggios with the distinct pattern: ascending 3rd 5th, 1st; descending 5th, 3rd 1st. The second component is two quaver chords on the first beat of each bar, scored in tutti. The third component is a dominant pedal, here in flute 1

The musical score for Ritornello Motif Z, bars 1 to 2, is presented in G major and 3/8 time. It consists of four staves: Solo Violin, Flute 1, Flute 2, and Strings & Continuo. The Solo Violin part features two semiquaver arpeggios in each bar, with the first bar ascending (3rd, 5th, 1st) and the second bar descending (5th, 3rd, 1st). Flute 1 plays a dominant pedal point (G5) with a slur over the two bars. Flute 2 plays a descending eighth-note scale in each bar. The Strings & Continuo part features two quaver chords on the first beat of each bar.

Figure 3 Ritornello Motif Z bar 1 to 2

It is important to remember that Bach's music is governed by very cogent and logical principles; these principles are to ensure aesthetic distinction and continuity. Note how the two arpeggios' linear motion ensures a conjunct progression from the last tonic note of bar one with the first note of bar two.

This step, from tonic to leading note is the most potent of relations employed within functional harmony.



Figure 4 Motif Z bar 1 to 2

It is then possible to analyse the strength, and therefore the immediacy of recognition of the Motif as dominant and tonic root note octaves separated by the semitone motion from tonic to leading note.

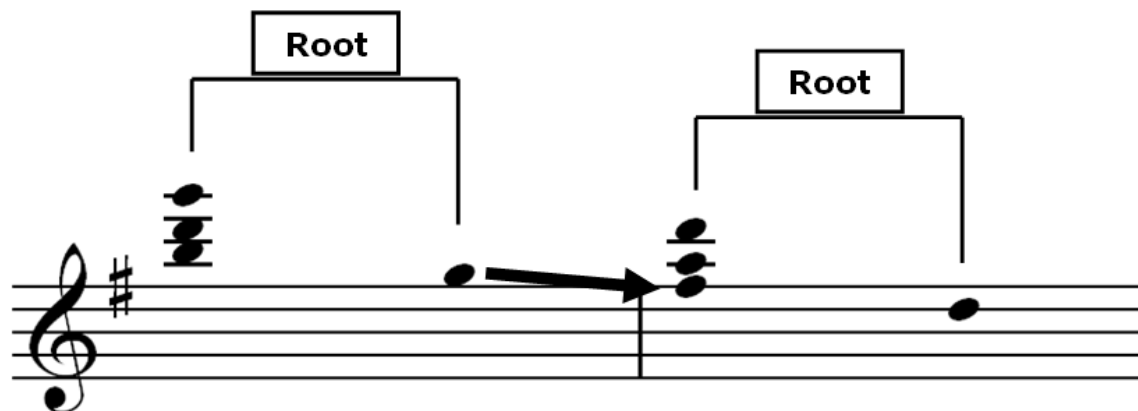


Figure 5 Ritornello Motif Z in reduction bar 1 to 2

The Ritornello Motif

The Ritornello Motif is disarmingly simple and set in two pairs; the first is derived from the tonic chord, the second is derived the dominant 7th chord.

The notes in rectangles are passing notes (non-harmony notes).



Figure 6 Ritornello Motif bar 3 to 6, flutes

The rhythmic feature allows the Motif differentiation as the work in general is imbued with driving semiquavers which brings a great sense of forward momentum. The subtle but telling employment of the quaver rest in bar 4 and 6 adds distinction to the music and again offers a very clear sense of differentiation. The motif is set initially in parallel thirds between the flutes. This simple reduction outlines a very clear linear descent.

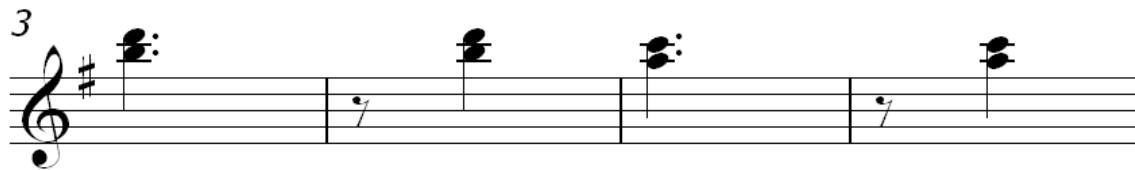


Figure 7 Ritornello Motif bar 3 to 6 in reduction

The second statement of the Ritornello Motif is at bar 9 to 12. The compositional *flux* that defines the character of the work is not simply a facet of the long-term structure but also of the short-term. In the restatement of the motif is in transposition, down a third, with the parallel motion now inverted to sixths rather than thirds.



Figure 8 Ritornello Motif bar 9 to 12, flutes

Motif Y

It is at this point that a distinct Motif appears; Motif Y. Its construction is uncomplicated but, in keeping with the work's ethos, its simplicity is a function for motivic differentiation.

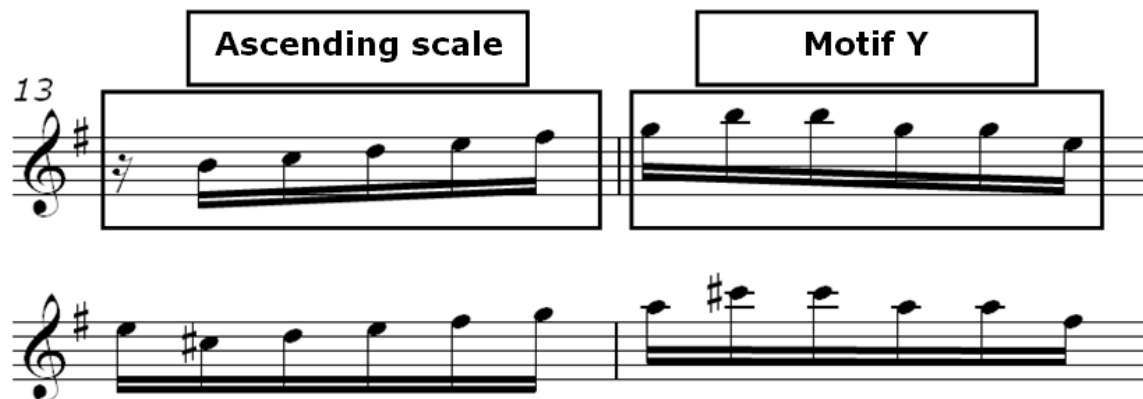


Figure 9 Motif Y bar 13 to 16

This motif has a very prominent role in the formal unity of the concerto as its highly differentiated pattern of repeated notes set in semiquavers allows it to exist as an integral component of both the Ritornelli and Episodes.

13

Solo Violin

Flute 1

Flute 2

16

Solo Vln.

Fl. 1

Fl. 2

19

Solo Vln.

Fl. 1

Fl. 2

Figure 10 Concertino bar 13 to 22

The Ritornello Motif is revisited between bar 23 to 35 beat 1. Here the music has modulated to the dominant key, D major.