

On Teaching

by Gavin Black



Buxtehude BuxWV 141 – Part 5

So far we have looked at the first three—or possibly four—of what might be seven or eight sections of the Buxtehude *Praeludium in E Major*, BuxWV 141. (As I discussed in the column of June 2010, there are a number of different ways of counting sections, depending on choices about how to count brief changes of texture at cadences and several other such issues. Are mm. 47–50 their own section? This does not really matter when it comes to understanding or learning the piece.) Several sections remain, and, as with the three already discussed, they display considerable contrast in texture—where that means primarily the extent to which the texture is or isn't contrapuntal—rhythm, tempo, meter, and mood. Three sections—mm. 60–72, 75–86, and 91 to the end—are truly contrapuntal. The latter two are real fugues or fughetas, constructed quite rigorously from their subjects; the first could probably also be analyzed as a fugue, but really comes across as a sort of contrapuntal mosaic derived from very short motifs.

The other measures—mm. 73–74 and 87–90—are non-contrapuntal. This does not mean that they fail to follow the normal rules of voice-leading when there is more than one note sounding. It means that they are not essentially constructed through the impulses and imperatives of imitative counterpoint, and that the listener's ears will not respond to them primarily by following an interaction between independent melodies. The first of these sections, mm. 73 and 74, resembles the *trillo longo* section discussed at length in the November 2010 column. The passage in mm. 87–90 is a texture new to the piece, something like a four-voice chorale, though not with the aesthetic of any chorale meant to be sung.

In this month's column I will talk about all but the last of the remaining sections. That section, mm. 90 to the end, will be the subject of next month's column, which will also include some

overall thoughts about this *Praeludium* and the act of learning it.

Measures 60–72

The passage beginning in m. 60 is a contrapuntal section in three voices. It is noteworthy for several things. It is the first section of the piece to have a tempo marking—*Presto*. Since this section immediately follows one that is essentially unmeasured, it is quite possible that the function of this tempo marking is more to make clear to the player that we are back to measured and regular music than to suggest a specific speed. Of course, it does at least place the music in the realm of “fast” rather than “slow”. This section is in three voices, with the exception of a few beats where a fourth voice briefly appears. (Two of those beats are at mm. 65–66; the other two are part of the cadential measure, m. 72.) The lowest of those voices has a compass that would not have been playable on the pedalboard of Buxtehude's time. Therefore it is almost certainly not a pedal line, even though it would fall under the feet fairly well. Oddly, the lowest voice does not go very low. Its lowest note is tenor D-sharp, more than an octave above the lowest note of the manual organ compass. Therefore the entire section has a “high” feeling to it.

The section opens as shown in Example 1. This could be read as the opening of a fugue exposition, with a measure-long subject in stretto with itself from the very beginning. However, as the section unfolds, each of the two halves of this theme (Examples 2 and 3) occurs more often by itself than paired with the other half. (The whole theme occurs six times, one or another half occurs separately sixteen times.) Furthermore, two other short themes are introduced, each of which occurs nine times (Examples 4 and 5).

These four short motifs, including the quarter-note that ends each one, account for by far most of the notes of this section. It is this pattern of four short motifs each recurring many times, not really coalescing into “subject” and “countersubject”, which leads me to describe the section as a contrapuntal mosaic. Since for the performer the important point about this kind of analysis is to allow the mind and the ears to know without fail what is coming up next in the piece, the act of going through the score and highlighting each of the motifs is probably worthwhile.

Hand choices

Since the lowest of the three voices is quite high in compass, it is not surprising that the middle voice can fit—almost every note of it—at least reasonably well in either hand. Therefore, this a good passage for a student to use in practicing the art of making hand choices—something that was discussed at some length in last month's column, though in the context of a very different piece. Here it is possible for the student to play the lower two voices all the way through in just the left hand—omitting just a few notes of the middle voice, in m. 67 for example. Then it is also possible to play the upper two voices in the right hand, again being required to omit only a few notes. Nei-

Example 1



Example 2



Example 3



Example 4



Example 5



ther of these is at all likely to be the best way to play the passage, of course. The next step is to go through and figure out what choice of hand actually works best for the middle voice as it goes along. This will be different from one student to another, based on existing fingering habits, details of hand size and shape, and musical goals. Any student should be able to work this out essentially for him- or herself, and it is a good exercise to do so.

Once the hand choices have been worked out, since this is a contrapuntal section, the player should practice the middle voice alone with the correct fingering, in order to make the transitions from one hand to another seem as smooth and natural as possible. This can supplement the usual practicing of individual voices and pairs of voices.

(In the few beats where Buxtehude has violated the voice structure by adding anomalous extra notes, it is fine to fudge the voice practicing a bit—omit the extra notes, or expand the voice that you are playing to include, briefly, two notes. As long as the student is aware of doing one of these things, it is fine.)

An important compositional/aesthetic point to notice in this section is that it ends with an incomplete cadence. Everything that develops in mm. 71–72 points strongly to a C-sharp triad on the first beat of m. 73. (It could be major or minor.) However, instead there is nothing there. The timing and pacing of this non-cadence is important, in particular, in setting up the next section.

Measures 73–74

This next “section” is short enough to earn quotation marks—only two measures (Example 6). This section is preceded and followed by contrapuntal sections that are longer than it is, and that are different from it in mood. That is, they are—though also quite different from each other—both marked by strong rhythmic motion and a regular pulse. This section is marked *con discrezione*, which would strongly suggest free, perhaps even unmeasured, rhythm, even if the overall nature of the writing did not already suggest that. The combination of the shortness of this section with the importance of the contrast that it offers to the sections around it suggests something to me that might seem a little bit simplistic but that I think is valid, namely that within the bounds of what can work,

it is a good idea to let this section take as long as it can. That is, the slower and freer it can be, the less perfunctory it will seem as a way station between the contrapuntal mosaic discussed above and the fughetta discussed below. This is just one thought, however; it certainly would not be a good idea to play it more slowly or more freely than seemed appropriate for the passage on its own terms. But all else being equal, perhaps the more time it occupies the more effective it will be.

The elements of this short passage are drawn from other sections of the work. The student should examine the notes of the solo opening measure for motivic connections to the previous section, and the notes of m. 74 for connections to earlier part of the work, in particular the *trillo longo* section. It becomes apparent that none of this is filler or cadential material. (I should admit that I myself did not notice the relationship between the melodic shapes in m. 73 and the material in mm. 60–72 until I had been studying the piece for quite a few years. There

Example 6



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Example 7

Example 8

1 2 1 3 4 3 2 5 + 3 2

Example 9

are probably details of the construction of this extremely well thought-out work that I have not noticed yet. Students should be encouraged to undertake as much detective work as they like, picking apart themes and scanning the whole piece for connections.)

Since the pedal note that enters in m. 74 does not change anything about the harmony or anything significant about the counterpoint, it is perhaps there for emphasis. It makes more emphatic the negation or contradiction of two things: first, the B-sharp that has prevailed since m. 71; second, the high tessitura of the section that has just ended.

Measures 75–86

The section that begins after the downbeat of m. 75 is a short fugue in three voices. The subject (Example 7) occurs six times in eight measures, followed by a fairly extended build-up to the final cadence—which this time is completed. This is again a manuals-only section—the lowest voice is too high for the pedal compass. Once again the notes of the middle voice can almost all be reached by either hand. For about five measures' worth of the section, there are actually only two voices being played, so hand choices as such are limited to the remaining measures. (When there are only two voices being played, there is of course rarely a reason not just to split them between the two hands.) The most interesting spots to think about hand choices and fingering are mm. 78 and 82 and perhaps mm. 84–85. Students should try several possibilities and in particular notice differences in the range of possible articulations with different hand/fingering choices.

A particular feature of this fugue subject is the presence of a repeated-note event at a crucial moment in the unfolding of the theme. The articulation and timing of this repetition each time it occurs is probably more important than any other one thing in shaping the overall effect of the passage. Therefore it is a wonderful opportunity for a student to think about planning repeated notes and to listen carefully to them. As I wrote in the column of January 2009, I believe strongly that whenever possible, it is a very good idea to use different fingers for repeated notes. I would, for example, finger the opening statement of this fugue subject as shown in Example 8 (this is in the left hand, of course).

As always, there are many other specific ways to do it. Changing fingers on repeated notes, in addition to giving the player more control over a wider range of articulation and timing possibilities, is also a free shot at repositioning the hand. In a passage like this, which has an active subject and, just for good measure, four sharps, repositioning the hand can be useful. Here is an example of a repeated-note fingering (in the right hand) that also positions the hand to deal easily with the other notes (Example 9).

Measures 87–90

The last of the four sections that we are looking at here is another fairly short non-contrapuntal passage (Example 10). Since the previous section ended with a convincing and well-heralded cadence in B-major, the opening harmony of this section is another instance of abrupt contradiction. The first note in the pedal sounds like it is inviting a continuation of the same harmonic scheme; when the chord is filled out in the hands it negates

Example 10

Adagio

Example 11

5 1 5

3

that harmony quite clearly. This passage is in the form, more or less, of a four-part chorale harmonization. The *Adagio* marking suggests a slow tempo for the section. Again it seems to me that, all else being equal, the slower these measures are, the more effective they will be as a counterweight to the rhythmic and contrapuntal material that surrounds them. The same range of possibilities for dividing the alto voice between the hands is found here as in other sections discussed above. In this case, since the lines are slow and not very complex, the choices are perhaps low stakes. However, in a slow bare-bones texture such as this, the addition of ornaments is always a possibility, and that might shape decisions about hand choices as well as fingering. For example, I like to play a trill on the final cadence note of m. 88. In order to accommodate that trill the most easily, I use a fingering like that in Example 11. There is nothing surprising or particularly original about this fingering. The gist of it is taking the first D-sharp in the left hand in order to permit the right hand to approach the trill in an unconstrained way. Students should try out various ornaments: trills, mordents, appoggiaturas, slides. (I sometimes play a slide all the way down from the high D-sharp to the G-sharp in the measure just above, or between the two pedal notes in

m. 89.) It is in principle fine to ornament all of the notes, or none of the notes or anything in between. The important thing is for the student to try things out, and react and think.

This month's discussion ends in the middle of a cadence, since the unresolved final note of m. 90 is resolved by the first note of the fugue subject of the final section. We will resolve this cadence and discuss the rest of the piece next month. ■

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In the wind . . .

by John Bishop

Expressly expressive

I once heard an orchestral conductor state that the pipe organ is not an expressive instrument because the player cannot alter the volume of a single pipe. This ignorant statement was part of his argument against including an expensive new organ in an even more expensive new concert hall.

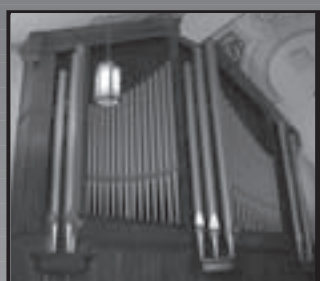
One might respond that most of the instruments of the symphony orchestra are unmusical because they can only play one note at a time. By saying “most” I’m excepting the strings of course, which can play two notes at time—maybe three under special circumstances. So an orchestra (by definition) needs many instruments to play music, expressively or not.

Aha! In order for the organ to be an expressive instrument, it comprises thousands of pipes. And big groups of those pipes are enclosed in wonderful expression machines that give the organist all sorts of control over dynamics.




The first Swell boxes were pretty simple affairs made of light wood with few shutters in front that were operated by a lever near the floor. You could push the lever down and a little sideways with your foot to latch it open, you could let it slam closed, or you hold it halfway open with your calf muscles a-trembling. Rigs like that are found on very old English organs and there are quite a few nineteenth-century American organs that still have expression boxes like that. In 1996 I restored an organ built by E. & G.C. Hoch in 1868 that had a “ratchet” Swell pedal. There was a sort of stationary wooden gear whose teeth could arrest the motion of the pedal in five or six different places. You could push the pedal a certain way to release the ratchet or you could leave the shutters partially open in any of those positions. And it was a good idea to release the ratchet as you opened the shutters—otherwise they said “click-click” as they opened.

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