

A PIANIST AND FIGURATIVE WRITING

MARINA CHERNAYA

Tver State University

Izyleček: Tako v stari kot v novi klavirski glasbi je prisotna značilna klavirska figuralika, ki je v primeru velikih glasbenih del neločljivo povezana s skladateljevo kompozicijsko tehniko in njegovim načinom glasbenega mišljenja. Ob študiju klavirskih glasbenih del je potrebno upoštevati tudi način, kako je skladatelj svojo kompozicijo notiral, saj je le po tej poti mogoče najti ključ za pravo razumevanje in interpretiranje njegovih zamisli.

Ključne besede: glasbena figuralika, glasbeno tkivo, kontrapunktska tehnika, analiza

Abstract: In keyboard music, early as well as modern, there are characteristic instrumental figures, which, in the case of great musical works, appear to be inextricably bound up with the compositional technique and the composer's way of musical thinking. In studying keyboard music, it is necessary to consider the method of notation of the musical texture; it is the examination of this, the notational aspect of the musical work, that makes possible a correct understanding and interpretation of the composer's ideas.

Keywords: figurative writing, musical texture, contrapuntal technique, texture analysis

A performer's guide to a text is a special way of penetrating deeply into a composer's conception. A performer usually has his own method of studying a musical composition. Piano texture is multi-faceted and varied in the principles of its construction, but notation itself can sometimes indicate important details. Such facts explain why great performers frequently expose unexpected features of written musical texts.

When examining a note text and turning it into concrete sounds a performer first looks at the peculiarities of the texture. Modern texture theory points out two phenomena which are important in texture making – figuration and doublings. They participate in shaping texture images. *Figurative writing* means the totality of devices for artificially putting into shape and organizing the smallest elements of musical texture. Thorough examination of figuration and doublings in a piece helps to solve the performer's problems when dealing with the notation.

The Baroque epoch is full of masterly styles which work on texture, so that texture composition in pieces of this period needs thorough analysis and special investigation of its notation. The extensive development of figurative devices in English virginal music,

practically at the dawn of the clavier era, shows the significance of such art for instrumental music, and its outstanding position in music history. There were individual devices of operating figures and tunes in the Baroque era: Byrd's technique of using variants of a figurative pattern; the intricate technique of combining figures and tunes in clavier music created by D. Scarlatti; Bach's masterly texture of a clavier piece with basic figures, and, finally, in general – a special combinatorial approach to composing texture which was well-known to the great masters.

To have a look through individual contrapuntal and figurative technique, W. Byrd's *Fantasy* for virginal "Bells" can be examined. The whole composition is based on "white" diatonic, and the basso ostinato movement is reminiscent of the cult "voces" *ut-re-mi*. The melodic elements in the other parts have connections with the traditional ancient subject *ut-re-mi-fa-sol-la*, too. All tunes are formed of the initial figure that, in its transformations, forms a set of figures participating in texture making.

There are 9 partitions in the structure of "Bells", with different durations. In the first partition the two upper voices enter canonically (Example 1). Further on, the number of parts increases from two to four. The initial figure *a* changes while forming the variants *a1*, *a2*. Renewing of the initial figure deals with changing the direct movement for a wavy movement, which leads to the creation of a new element *b*. On the basis of *b* up and down moving variants appear – *b1*, *b2* and *b3*. A new element *c* comes from the central tone *e*, on which both of the basic elements (*a* and *b*) were directed. This element has different variants – *c1*, *c2* and *c3* (Example 2). An interesting combination appears when the shortened *c1* and *c2* are contrapuntally combined with the final partition of *c3* (Example 3). The stop on the dominant point after the flowing figurative movement is a sign of a certain boundary in the structure of the *Fantasy*. After coming in tonic, a texture modulation takes place. A fluent figuration type of singing is replaced by an ostinato type of passage, and the rule of texture structure changes, too. Layers of contrapuntal texture interchange, so the upper part becomes the lowest part. The passages are based on two new figures *d* and *f*, being variants of the initial figure in direct motion (Example 4).

Example 1

W. Byrd, *Fantasy* "Bells"



Example 2

W. Byrd, *Fantasy "Bells"*



Example 3

W. Byrd, *Fantasy "Bells"*



Example 4

W. Byrd, *Fantasy "Bells"*



The initial functions of the parts are restored in the third partition. The inverted figure *c2* gains doublings, the inverted figure *d* enters in augmentation and is accompanied by doublings, too. A new element *g*, which is important in further composition, is introduced in the fourth partition (Example 5). The fifth partition gains reprise features in working with the elements, and in the sixth partition an elaborating motion is concentrated. Transformations of the element *g* lead to the rapprochement of *g* and *c2*: in the last bar of this partition, a sign of equality can be put between them since *c2* replaces *g*. The seventh partition is a variation on the material of the fourth partition. In the extensive eighth partition a passage component becomes important. The figure *f* is inversed and transformed into a tirade, and the *basso ostinato* figure is doubled in the upper part (Example 6). The texture becomes quite homophonic, which is proved by the harmonic figurations in the middle space. Such a construction of the texture is not stable, and is followed by “descanting under the Ground”¹ when the initial *sol-fa-mi-re* is renewed in the upper part

¹ Ch. Simpson, *The Division-violist on the Art of Playing Extempore upon a Ground*, London,

with contrapuntal accompaniment in the bass voice containing passages constructed out of modifications of *d* and *f*. In the last, ninth, partition, the initial contrapuntal texture is restored completely, and the masterly facture contains easily recognized variants of *g*, *f* and *d*. The fantasy structure is brought to an end by returning to the initial principles of texture structure and establishing the basic figures.

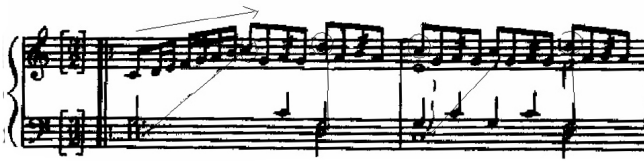
Example 5

W. Byrd, *Fantasy* “Bells”



Example 6

W. Byrd, *Fantasy* “Bells”



There are several principles which act in the construction of a free composition of Byrd’s *Fantasy*, reprise-like, rondo-like and variability being among them. Due to the similarity of the initial and closing partitions, as well as the fourth and the seventh partitions, the structure has a strict plan with the centre in the sixth “elaborative” partition. Fluency of texture depends on the contrapuntal movement of voices, as well as on the figurative movement which gives coloring to basic tunes.

D. Scarlatti’s technique in figurative writing differs from W. Byrd’s technique. In the varied texture of the various “Exercises” by Scarlatti, now called sonatas, multiform, even real combinatorial texture can be found. For example, combinatorial play with small tunes is masterfully led by the composer in the initial bars of the *Sonata* K. 156 in C major (Example 7). Tunes *a*, *b*, *c* and a tune-helper *x* participate in the construction of the four initial bars. The scheme here is the following:

<i>a</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>c</i>	<i>c</i> ^{<i>I</i>}	<i>c</i>	<i>c</i> ^{<i>I</i>}
	<i>a</i>	<i>x</i>	<i>b</i> (<i>R</i>)		<i>b</i> (<i>I</i>)	
	<i>a</i>			<i>x</i>		

New York, 1965, p. 57.

Example 7

D. Scarlatti, *Sonata K. 156* in C major



Tune *a* has the function of the initial impulse, *initio*. It is like the capital letter of a text, so the following figures are similar to it and they are all somehow alike. Tune *b* contrapuntally accompanies *a* and then, inversed, starts to accompany another participant in this combinatorial game. Tune *c* has two variants – with a stop on the dominant point and with a movement to the tonic. The elements are used differently: *a* only vertically, and *c* only horizontally, whereas the displacement of *b* deals with the transformation of this tune. In the following four bars *a* and *b* are excluded, and the activity of *c* increases greatly. Movement on chord tones provides the element *d*. New variants of *c* appear, and their activity leads to a curious combination, with the scheme:

$$\begin{array}{cccccc} c^2 & c^2 & c^2 & c^2 & c^2 & c^2 \\ c^2 & c^2 & c^2 & c^2 & c^2 & c^2 \\ x(I)d & x(I)d & x(I)c^3 & x(I)c^3 & & \end{array}$$

Later, the element *b* becomes active, and one of the combinations gives the following scheme:

$$\begin{array}{ccc} e & b^1 & e \\ b^1 & bI^1 & bI^1 \\ xI & bR & xI & bR \end{array}$$

Combinatorial play with tunes is very intricate, and has various stages when the roles played by elements are exchanged. Scarlatti seems like to exhaust the variants of using figures and tunes in this combinatorial game.

For the Baroque era, Scarlatti's manner of using simple figures as sounding equivalent to artificial images was very individual and special. For example, flourishes of arpeggio

symbolize a grand entrance or a valuable impression of a person, or imitate an energetic gesture (Example 8); repeated laconic figures of configuration, which was unusual for that period (taken from folk music), create the image of a guitar flamenco (Example 9). The last abstract comes from Scarlatti's *Sonata* K. 33 in D major, where all of the subjects start with a third that is broken and repeated several times, or the sounds of the third are taken simultaneously and also repeated several times (Example 10). Scarlatti was looking for a picturesque sound in the folk manner of figuration, and in this he foresaw a trend in the romantic music of the 19th century.

Example 8

D. Scarlatti, *Sonata* K. 66 in B-flat major



Example 9

D. Scarlatti, *Sonata* K. 33 in D major

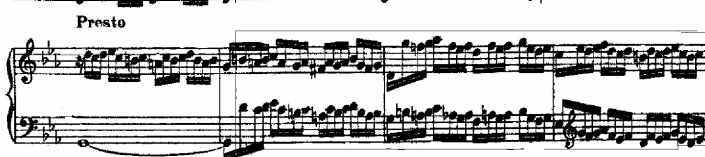


Example 10

D. Scarlatti, *Sonata* K. 33 in D major



J. S. Bach's texture is sometimes based on using similar figures or on varying one basic figure. In both C minor cycles of the *Well-tempered Clavier* (*WTC* – or “Forty-eight”), texture-making involves in its movement a mordant pattern. Two examples from the preludes in C minor (*WTC* I and II) show how differently this element is involved in the texture structure (Examples 11 and 12). The cycle in *WTC* I is satiated with figures most of all, and the basic pattern runs throughout the texture. The *Prelude*'s figurations sounding like a roaring flame are based on this figure. Being varied rhythmically, the pattern penetrates the fugue's texture (compare Examples 11 and 13). Though the notation in the *Prelude* indicates the usual two-part texture, the *Prelude*'s texture has the features of a hidden, multi-voiced structure. There are two plans of sounding in reality (this is explained in Example 11). The marked figure is used in the background, and the main sounds of half-measures, having melodic significance, appear prominently, as they are situated in the extreme registers. The background contains a constantly repeated double-voiced horizontal block, with a strictly outlined contour. The powerful harmonic movement creates great energy, as though a special “sounding magma” is being born that covers the singing melody and a contrapuntal bass. Zigzag-like figurations, including the same element, produce violent exclamations, which begin with the constant dominant point (Example 14).

Example 11J. S. Bach, *Prelude and Fugue in C minor (Well-Tempered Clavier I)***Example 12**J. S. Bach, *Prelude and Fugue in C minor (Well-Tempered Clavier II)***Example 13**J. S. Bach, *Prelude and Fugue in C minor (Well-Tempered Clavier I)***Example 14**J. S. Bach, *Prelude and Fugue in C minor (Well-Tempered Clavier I)*

The culminating point is reached in the *Presto*, where in spite of a new feature of voice-leading – imitations – the initial texture contour is in fact back. But the texture block itself is abandoned, and instead of it a sort of band movement is created. Here, the hidden melody as it was in the initial portion of the *Prelude* is absent, so that figurations take on the function of thematic representation. There are no resemblances of it in the final recitative, but the element appears in the last bar of the *Prelude* (Example 15). The last variant of the main figure pervades all layers of the polyphonic texture in the *Fugue*: this element is repeated within the subject, and it is transferred sequentially in interludes in one or two voices, forming blocks familiar to the *Prelude* texture, going through different modifications. So the main element of the musical texture in the cycle – the repeated figure – gains the unusual features of mobility, ability of variant changes, and, finally, features of characteristic individuality.

Example 15

J. S. Bach, *Prelude and Fugue in C minor (Well-Tempered Clavier I)*



The other *Prelude* in the C minor cycle (*WTC II*) has a 2-part structure. In the first part, the mordant figure forms a thematic chain, in which rolling links based on the main figure descend in sequences. In the second half, repetitions of the main figure form an axis, concerning which a hidden melody is formed (Example 16). “Rolling”, “bubbling” figures, which pervade the musical texture of the cycles in C minor (in both parts of the *WTC*), have a semantic sense that stands near the artificial image of catastrophic presentiment, the violence of an all-absorbing element. The compound structure of Bach’s texture has its own semantics, and special skills are needed to “read” it. Texture analysis of the cycles in the *WTC* helps in creating images for an imaginative performance.

Example 16

J. S. Bach, *Prelude and Fugue in C minor (Well-Tempered Clavier II)*



Composers succeeding J. S. Bach, the most famous representatives of German contrapuntal tradition, think that his art represents the highest peak in the history of music. Not only Mozart but also Beethoven showed interest in the fugue, after studying Bach’s pieces, but it can be pointed out that in the Romantic era F. Mendelssohn, R. Schumann and J. Brahms turned to devices familiar to the previous epochs when dealing with the

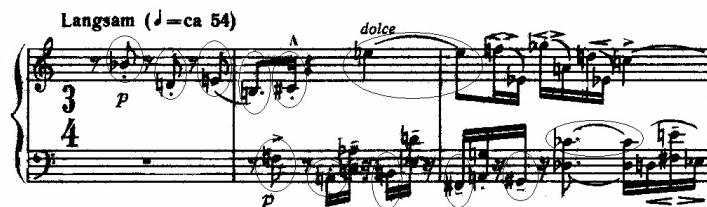
German contrapuntal tradition. The 20th century is famous for neo-classical and neo-baroque styles. Many composers turned to deep studies of Baroque polyphony, and in some cases they were brought to create original techniques by using the rules of old contrapuntal art in new means of music. Amongst them are some very important works by P. Hindemith and A. Schoenberg. Each great composer-pianist had his own complex of devices, which are mirrored in the notation. This is a good subject for investigating the problems of interpretation.

The ideas of A. Schoenberg are embodied individually in the use of figurative and contrapuntal devices. A combination of masterly polyphonic technique and original figurative writing can be observed in *Five pieces* op. 23, for example, in the third piece of the cycle – *Langsam*. It begins as a fugue with a subject and a real answer that is varied with figurative and doubling devices (Example 17a). The sound complex is formed at the beginning, and then, on this basis, many combinations are found. The composition of this piece reminds one of the German *ricercar* tradition because of the compound devices and changes in the rules of the voice-leading. In the last six bars (Example 17c), all the sounds forming the subject and the answer are collected in sound complexes (on the basis of enharmonic equality of tones). One more texture component here is the changing of the rhythm axis, based on the chord complex, with the symmetrical structure shown in Example 17b. The tone complex from the subject and “axis” tones *sol-c* create the so-called “central element of the system”. Schoenberg uses contrapuntal devices when making different transpositions of the initial constructions. Except when varying the composition-appearance² of the subject-sound complex, but not leaving the framework of the given coordination of tones, Schoenberg operates with chromatic tunes and a special grace figure as well (Example 18a). The composer creates a transposition in the depth of the texture, exchanging rhythmical elements and constructing a figurative chain of modifications of the grace figure (Example 18b). There are two interludes corresponding to each other (from the 5th and 23rd bars) – see Examples 19a and 19b. The most obvious changes in the transpositions here concern the rhythmical solutions and the introduction of figurative tones. One of the portions contains a figurative chain dealing with rhythmic figuration. Original interpretation of the device depends on giving accompaniment to a *stretto* superposition of the answer, and the subject in extension for maintaining high activity in the inner movement (Example 20). The sounds of the accompaniment do not leave the frames of the sound complex given at the beginning, figures of jumps in thirds proceed from transpositions of intervals. Firstly, the subject is given in the straight movement and the answer is in a mirrored inversion, and then this transposition is inversed taking accompaniment in its process.

² The subject is given in diminution (Example 19), in extension (Example 20), inversed in a crayfish movement (Example 18a).

Example 17a

A. Schoenberg, *Five pieces op. 23, Langsam*



Example 17b

A. Schoenberg, *Five pieces op. 23, Langsam*



Example 17c

A. Schoenberg, *Five pieces op. 23, Langsam*



Example 18a

A. Schoenberg, *Five pieces* op. 23, *Langsam*

Example 18a shows the first 15 measures of the piece. The score is in G major (one sharp) and 3/4 time. It begins with a piano (p) dynamic and a tempo marking. The music features a complex, chromatic texture with many accidentals. Dynamics include piano (p), fortissimo (sf), mezzo-forte (mf), and pianissimo (pp). The piece is marked 'Langsam' (slow).

Example 18b

A. Schoenberg, *Five pieces* op. 23, *Langsam*

Example 18b shows measures 16-18 of the piece. The music continues with a fortissimo (ffp) dynamic. Measure numbers 16, 17, and 18 are indicated at the end of the staves. The texture remains dense and chromatic.

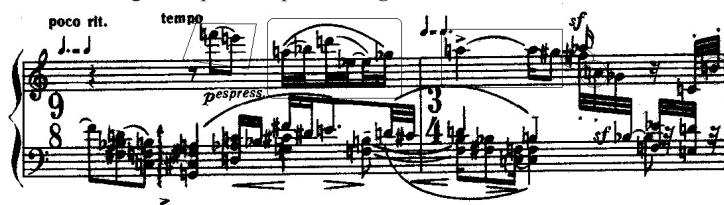
Example 19a

A. Schoenberg, *Five pieces* op. 23, *Langsam*

Example 19a shows measures 19-25 of the piece. The score includes a 'poco rit.' (slightly ritardando) marking. Dynamics include mezzo-forte (mf), piano (p), and pianissimo (pp). The music continues with its characteristic chromatic complexity. Measure numbers 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, and 25 are indicated.

Example 19b

A. Schoenberg, *Five pieces op. 23, Langsam*



Example 20

A. Schoenberg, *Five pieces op. 23, Langsam*

Musical score for Example 20, A. Schoenberg's *Five pieces op. 23, Langsam*. The score is for piano and features complex, overlapping textures. It includes markings for "poco rit." and "p". The piece is in 3/4 time and consists of 30 measures.

The rapprochement of contrapuntal and figurative writing was a sign of the times, but as far as Schoenberg is concerned it must be noted that he wanted to revive the traditions of the highly cultivated writing in German Baroque music. He acted like a successor of the Viennese classics: Mozart on getting acquainted with Bach's work created masterpieces in polyphonic genres; Beethoven started to compose fugues in his last period, and Schoenberg turned to intricate texture making with the use of compound devices.

Analysis of musical texture as if through the “prism” of figurative writing has an important practical significance in a pianist’s work. Thinking about “events” occurring in a musical text and their sound embodiment makes it possible to find the way of interpretation. A search for associations helps to create artificial images of music, and also solve technical problems. Examination of the individual style of notation is very important in the search for a proper interpretation, and in many cases thorough texture analysis can help in understanding the composer’s ideas.

PIANIST IN GLASBENA FIGURALIKA

Povzetek

Pri študiju teksta vodi interpreta želja po čim globljem prodoru v skladateljeve zamisli. Vsak izvajalec ima svojo lastno metodo študija kompozicije. Z ozirom na konstrukcijske principe je klavirska tekstura mnogoznačna in raznolika. Pri preučevanju glasbenega zapisa in njegovem oživljanju v dejanski zvok se izvajalec usmerja predvsem na tekstovne značilnosti in posebnosti. V visoko profesionalni glasbi je mogoče opazovati raznoliko glasbeno figuraliko, ki vključuje različne načine organiziranja elementov glasbenega tkiva. V baročnem obdobju je nastalo mnogo dovršenih opusov, katerih značilno kompozicijsko tkivo kliče k natančnejši analizi, ki mora upoštevati tudi notacijo. Posamezni baročni skladatelji so razvili lastno glasbeno figuraliko; Byrd se je usmerjal v tehniko variiranja danega figuralnega vzorca; za D. Scarlattija je značilno pretanjeno kombiniranje klavirskih figur z melodiko; Bachova dela izkazujejo po eni strani zanimivo in originalno figuraliko, po drugi pa kompozicijsko kombinatoriko, kar je značilnost velikih mojstrov. Posebej so z ozirom na figuraliko obravnavane naslednje skladbe: Fantazija *Bells* W. Byrda, izbrane sonate D. Scarlattija ter oba para preludijev in fug v c-molu iz Bachovega *Temperiranega klavirja*. V 20. stol. so se uveljavili neoklasicistični in neobarični slogovni principi. Mnogi skladatelji so se usmerili v poglobljen študij baročne polifonije in v nekaterih primerih jih je uporaba starih kontrapunktskih postopkov v novih sredstvih privedla k ustvaritvi originalnih novih kompozicijskih tehnik. Zanimiva je skladba *Langsam* A. Schönberga (*Pet skladb* op. 23), ki jo je mogoče analizirati z istega vidika in na podoben način kot omenjene kompozicije baročnih skladateljev. Spajanje in združevanje kontrapunktskih postopkov z glasbeno figuraliko je bilo značilno za čas in Schönberg si je še posebej prizadeval oživiti postopke in tehnike iz visoko razvite nemške baročne glasbe. Pri študiju bodisi stare bodisi novejšje glasbe je potrebno upoštevati način, kako je skladatelj svojo kompozicijo notiral, saj je le po tej poti mogoče najti ključ za pravo razumevanje skladateljevih zamisli.