

the art of

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BAGI

Die Kunst der Fuge (The Art of Fugue), BWV 1080.

The origins of *The Art of Fugue* are obscure. Bach had always entertained the idea of a *magnum opus* that would challenge his creativity in an area that he loved and where he was already a master, that of fugal writing. The idea might have been given further impetus as the result of an indirect dare from the great Baroque theorist, Johann Mattheson, who is said to have provoked Bach into proving his mettle in this greatest of contrapuntual mediums in 1738. Apocryphal or not, Bach started composing the work that very year, completing it in 1742, and began a revision immediately thereafter. We are hearing the revised score, left incomplete at Bach's death in 1750. To compose a series of fugues, or *contrapuncti*, was a challenge that involved constructing a theme that would provide the basis for good countersubjects, inversions, diminished and augmented values, and canons – in essence, every possible transformation of a fugal melody. Bach had always loved the key of D minor –a well known example is the famous *Chaconne*

from his D minor Partita for violin. He was also aware that one could smile, with a glint in the eye, in this normally somber key (listen to the *Corrente* and *Gigue* of the same partita). Therefore, given Bach's dedication to the music of the church, plus the fact that the Dorian mode (starting on D) was the first of the church modes, his choice of tonality for this *magnum opus* should come as no surprise, one that takes us on a journey of nearly an hour and a half and holds our attention throughout. Take a simple broken D minor triad, add four ascending diatonic notes, then four descending, and you have a subject that fits together perfectly in both regular and inverted form. Weave in harmony and melody, following the best contrapuntal principles, and you have a great work of art.

Bach was enthusiastic upon hearing Silbermann's improvements on the early fortepiano, improvements that Bach himself had suggested, all about the time of the near completion of *Die Kunst der Fuge*. Even though there is no conclusive proof that Bach wrote these fugues and canons for a keyboard instrument, let alone for this recent addition to the keyboard family, the fact that one of the mirror fugues (#13) was reconfigured for two harpsichords increases the possibility that a keyboard instrument was in the back of his mind. We know that Bach's favorite keyboard instrument was the organ. However, on a four-manual organ with pedals, only three distinct voices can be clearly distinguished at any given time (assuming organists only have two hands!), even when applying a variety of articulations. With harpsichordists, things are just as

problematic. Using two keyboards and varying articulation, one can still only produce two distinct timbres at a time – and *The Art of Fugue* often calls for four. This is where contemporary pianists have an advantage. With good voicing and a lot of practice, we can differentiate four voices properly. With creative articulation, we can approximate the sounds of many instruments. And, as the production of sound on a harpsichord is not immediately muted, we can surmise that Bach would have condoned the judicious use of the pedal on a modern piano as well, adding color to the mix. However, in the final analysis, there is no need to substantiate using the piano, or any other instrument, in performing this great work. Bach's instrumental music is so pure that it is eminently transcribable in any medium. *The Art of Fugue* sounds wonderful in versions for string quartet, vocal quartet, brass quintet, wind ensemble, string orchestra, synthesizer. In short, any instrument, or combination thereof, that brings this music alive and is faithful to the score will do justice to its greatness.

The score for *Die Kunst der Fuge* is virtually free of dynamic, tempo or articulation markings, a common practice during Bach's time. This gives the performer a certain amount of leeway, and no two performances of this work resemble one another beyond what the notes themselves dictate. I have performed and recorded a great deal of Bach over the years and have read many tomes on the subject, including C.P.E. Bach's *Die wahre Art das Clavier zu spielen (The True Manner in which to perform on the Keyboard)*,

Paul Badura-Skoda's excellent *Playing Bach at the Keyboard*, and not least Christoph Wolff's monumental monograph *Johann Sebastian Bach: The Learned Musician*. To this have been added my own perceptions as they have evolved over time, a process that is ongoing and never ending.

Bach himself didn't stipulate any specific order of the contrapuncti. In the later of the two versions, published posthumously in 1752, the fugues are laid out as follows: numbers 1-4 are simple fugues, based on the original fugal subject; numbers 5-7 are contra fugues, providing the fugal subject not only with its inversion, but the subjects are increasingly layered on top of each other, creating a richer and much more complex tapestry; numbers 8-11 introduce new fugal themes, numbers 8 and 11 discarding the original fugal subject completely; numbers 12-15 are mirror fugues, and numbers 16-19 are canons. Number 20, Contrapunctus 14, the famous incomplete fugue with its three fugal subjects and suggestions of a probable fourth subject, i.e. the original fugue, was added later. In particular, where to place the canons within the whole has been a point of contention with musicians for years, some preferring to intersperse them between the groups of fugues outlined above. For reasons of unity, and not wishing to interrupt the inevitability (for wont of a better word) of contrapuncti 1-11, I have chosen the way they are laid out.

Following is a brief synopsis of each of the works:

Contrapunctus 1 – the four-bar fugal subject is unvarying in its rhythmic and melodic shape.

Contrapunctus 2 – the same four-bar fugue is accompanied by dotted eighth notes in the Baroque style of notes inégales. To contemporary ears, it sounds jaunty and a bit jazzy.

Contrapunctus 3 – the four-bar fugue is now inverted, the countersubjects more inventive.

Contrapunctus 4 – beginning on the dominant, the fugue is inverted yet again, the order of the first two entries of the fugue switched around from contrapunctus 3, allowing for more varied countersubjects, amongst which four ascending and descending eighths (the latter part of the original fugal subject), a four-note chromatic turn that evolves from this, and a falling third that sounds, at times, like a coo coo!

Contrapuntus 5 – again, this fugue begins on the dominant, similar to the opening of the previous contrapunctus, excepting the subject is dotted. The four-bar subject is interrupted in the fourth bar by the inversion, lending the work an impatient quality, the

interruptions coming at increasingly shorter intervals throughout. At the conclusion, both *rectus* and *inversus* come together in rich six-part harmony.

Contrapunctus 6 per Diminutionem in Stylo Francese – beginning once again on the tonic, the first two entries are switched from contrapunctus 5, and both inversus and rectus are combined in diminution. As in contrapunctus 5, voices get piled up on top of each other – at times, three out of the four voices are competing for our attention, all in different rhythms. Add to this the stylo francese, the double dotted rhythms of a French overture, and you have an amazingly complicated work.

Contrapunctus 7 per Augmentationem et Diminutionem – with the addition of augmentation, things become even more complicated. The dotted rhythm figure continues as the subject in both rectus and inversus. In bar five, the original theme is augmented by a factor of four in the bass, lasting for eight bars. Once again, the entries in both diminution and augmentation are layered on top of each other, creating an amazing harmonic structure held together by strings of sixteenth notes.

Contrapunctus 8- this is the first of two triple fugues, the first in three-part harmony instead of four, and the first to be completely free of the original fugal subject. The light-hearted banter, accentuated when the second subject enters in descending repeated

eighths, comes as a relief after the seriousness of the previous *contrapuncti*. The third subject, superimposed on the other two, will become the first subject of the second triple fugue, *contrapunctus 11*.

Contrapunctus 9 alla Duodecima is the undisputed virtuoso piece of the entire cycle. With the first two entries a twelfth apart, galloping descending and ascending eighth notes are heard in what appears at first to be only three-part harmony, four-part harmony not being established until bar 22. Bar 35 introduces the original fugue of contrapunctus 1 on top of the galloping motive, lending a welcome feeling of stability.

Contrapunctus 10 alla Decima – the rest on the first beat of the first two bars is redolent of the third fugal subject in contrapunctus 8. This rest lends a lightness to the theme, allowing for clever interactions of the voices (evidence bars 14-16). In bar 23, the fugal subject in dotted rhythm of contrapunctus 5 returns, followed by its inversion one bar later. In bar 75, this dotted subject appears in the soprano, combined with the opening theme in the bass, then reversed in bar 85. This happens twice more throughout the piece.

Contrapunctus 11- the climax to the first half of the cycle. The first of the three fugal subjects is the *inversus* of the third fugal subject of contrapunctus 8. The second subject is the *inversus* of the first subject of the same contrapunctus, In bar 89, this second subject

is brought in simultaneously with the third subject, which is the *inversus* of the second subject yet again of *contrapunctus 8*. This third subject, moreover, has taken on a more serious character, ascending eighths projecting an urgency lacking previously. Developing these themes ultimately engenders a *contrapunctus* considerably longer than the others.

Contrapunctus 12 rectus et inversus – the first of two mirror fugues, four voices in triple meter. The original fugal theme is laid bare, with delicate interjections from the addition of each new voice. As the theme quickly dissolves, we are left with a gentle minuet focused on rising and descending D minor scales covering the interval of a fifth, matching the outline of the original fugal subject. Bach originally combined both rectus and inversus together on the same page, the voices separated (the entire Art of Fugue is written this way, in fact), the whole completely symmetrical and resembling what could be, in musical notation, a beautiful Impressionist painting reflected in the water. For reasons of overlapping voices, amongst others, this pairing is also, to my way of thinking, the most technically demanding of the entire cycle.

Contrapunctus 13 rectus et inversus – in duple meter and three voices, the energetic triplets suggest a gigue. The *inversus* is almost identical to the fugal subject in the last movement of the E minor Brahms cello sonata. Yet, there is no question here of 'the chicken and the egg'. We *know* which came first!

Canon in Hypodiapason (Canon alla Octava) – the first of four canons, all in two voices, continues the mood of a gigue. The left hand dutifully follows the right, four bars later (and an octave lower).

Canon alla Decima (Contrapunto alla Terza) – a canon at the tenth (also the third). Here, the left hand leads, although not for long. Upper and lower parts compete for attention throughout. The whole is so beautifully wrought that we scarcely realize we are listening to an exercise in canonic writing.

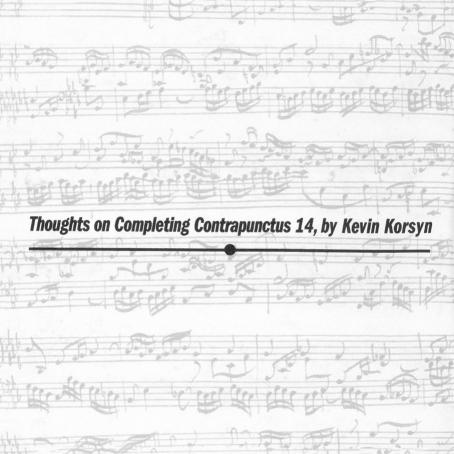
Canon alla Duodecima (in Contrapunto alla Quinta) – canon at the twelfth. Left hand sextuplets dominate the first eight bars. The introduction of the second voice, always strictly at the interval of the twelfth, assures agreeable harmonic resolutions.

Canon in Hypodiatessaron (per Augmentationem in Contrario Motu) – perhaps the most interesting of the canons, and one of my favorites of the entire cycle. The theme in the right hand is mirrored in the left, starting in bar 4 in augmentation and in contrary motion. By the middle of the piece at bar 53, the left hand has only completed 24 bars of the right hand melody, whereupon the roles are switched, and the left hand repeats what the right hand has done at the beginning, albeit an octave lower. Four bars later, the right hand repeats what the left has done at the beginning, two octaves higher than

the original in order to accommodate good voice leading. We marvel at the way that one note out of place in either voice would render the entire melodic structure unworkable! That something can be so hauntingly beautiful at the same time defies explanation. Whereas the earlier version of this canon was more ornamented, I prefer the simplicity of this later version.

Contrapunctus 14 - the incomplete contrapunctus, around which controversy shall always exist - a triple fugue, the first subject related to the original subject in contrapunctus 1, giving the feeling of a chorale that reflects on and sums up all that had gone before. The second subject in eighth notes picks up the pace and comes to a cadence on the subdominant, a connection to the plagal cadences found quite often in the closing bars of the previous contrapuntci. This cadence is interrupted by the B-A-C-H motive heard in others of Bach's works (the notes B flat, A, C and B - B flat is called 'B' in German, B natural is 'H'). We hear the inversus of B-A-C-H a few times before the writing trails off and stops, mid-phrase, in bar 239. Bach had put down his pen a couple of years prior to his death in 1750, intending to finish the work and most probably intending it to be a quadruple fugue, in which the original fugal subject in contrapunctus 1 would be added to the first three to bring the work to a thrilling and fulfilling conclusion, Indeed, it is thought that he actually did write a completion that subsequently went missing. Lacking further evidence, the fact that it remained unfinished will always be a

mystery. His failing eyesight could have been part of the reason, albeit he composed other works after that. Bach's second son, Carl Philip Emanuel, led the world to believe that the incompletion was due to his father's death, and we know now that it is even possible that Bach ran out of his preferred manuscript paper, a momentary interruption becoming permanent as other matters took precedence. Attempting to fill the gap, the editors of the first edition published in 1751, the year after Bach's death, included the chorale, Wenn wir in höchsten Nöten sein (When we are in deepest distress), thereby bringing the work to a dignified conclusion. Throughout the years, some scholars and performers have thought it a sacrilege to touch that which was left empty. But, many others, including myself, feel strongly that Bach meant the work to be completed with a fourth fugal subject in all its transformations, a conclusion that would complement everything that preceded it. In my view, a work of such magnitude needs and deserves nothing less. Having entertained a number of versions of this ending, I have decided to use the completion by my colleague, Dr. Kevin Korsyn, Professor of Music Theory at the University of Michigan School of Music. Professor Korsyn's extraordinary analysis of these final pages convinces me that his is the most worthy finale to date of this, arguably the greatest of Papa Bach's instrumental works. Professor Korsyn's Thoughts on Completing Contrapunctus 14 are included below.



Contrapunctus 14, the enormous unfinished fugue published by Bach's executors as part of his Art of *Fugue* (BWV 1080), has long been a source of fascination and controversy. Since the manuscript breaks off before Bach had introduced the motto theme that pervades all the other movements, some scholars have even questioned whether it was intended to be part of the cycle at all.

Gustav Nottebohm, who is best known for his pioneering research on Beethoven's sketchbooks, made a decisive contribution to the debate in 1881, when he showed that the motto theme can indeed be combined with the other three fugue subjects that Bach had introduced in the fragment, so that Bach must have intended the piece to be a quadruple fugue. This discovery may have stimulated the first attempts to complete the piece, including a version published by Hugo Riemann in 1895. Nottebohm's solution, however, did not resolve all questions, as skeptics were quick to observe that his quadruple combination works best when the opening subject appears in the bass. When that theme appears in any other voice, some awkward voice leading results; the 9-8 suspensions, for example, that occur when Subject 2 is above Subject 1, invert to 7-8 suspensions when the positions of those voices are reversed.

Donald Francis Tovey made the next major intervention in this debate when he published his own completion in 1931. He showed that Bach devised the four subjects to fit together

in more ways than one by using invertible counterpoint at the twelfth; in addition to Nottebohm's discovery, he realized that if Subject 1 is transposed up a fifth or a twelfth against the other three subjects, it produces a number of beautiful new combinations that are both euphonious and easily playable on one keyboard. Clearly the two very different solutions discovered by Nottebohm and Tovey had to be programmed into the material by Bach himself.

Unfortunately, most of the published attempts to complete the piece have used only the combinations discovered by Nottebohm, ignoring Tovey's brilliant discovery of invertible counterpoint at the twelfth. The completion published by Davitt Moroney, for example, uses only two quadruple combinations, both featuring Subject 1 in the bass. This violates the principle that I like to call Bach's fugal democracy, in which all the subjects in a fugue appear in all the voices, a principle Bach respects in all the double and triple fugues in *The Art of Fugue*. Other completions use the four subjects in all four voices, but allow the rough and tumble counterpoint that results when Nottebohm's solution is applied mechanically.

Tovey's own completion, however, is not without problems of its own. Some of the quadruple combinations result in a progression of a perfect fifth to an augmented fifth or the reverse; Bach did not find this possibility problematic, because he uses it at m. 204 of the existing fragment and in a number of other works. Tovey, however, had a Victorian

attitude toward such things, treating successions of equal and unequal fifths as equally objectionable. To avoid this imaginary problem, Tovey added an awkward and unnecessary syncopation to the motto theme.

Given these limitations in all the existing versions, I decided to compose my own completion of Contrapuntcus 14. For readers who wish to know more about my compositional choices, I discuss my solutions in "At the Margins of Music Theory, History, and Composition: Completing the Unfinished Fugue in *Die Kunst der Fuge* by J. S. Bach" (*Music Theory and Analysis* 3/11 [2016], pp. 115-143).

Some performers prefer to stop playing at the point where Bach's manuscript breaks off. As David Schulenberg pointed out, however, this practice "invites a sentimental response," based on the now discredited idea that Bach died while writing this fugue. Christoph Wolff shows that the hand-drawn musical staves on Bach's final page were crooked and badly ruled, so Bach may simply have continued writing on another piece of paper. Wolff believes that Bach completed the fugue, or at least sketched its quadruple combinations, on another sheet that is now lost. Wolff calls this missing manuscript, which has become a sort of Holy Grail of Bach studies, "Fragment X." Until this elusive manuscript is found, we can only imagine its contents as an activity of free thought. My completion is an attempt to imagine Fragment X.

CRAIG SHEPPARD



Craig Sheppard is Professor of Piano and Chair of the Keyboard Division at the School of Music of the University of Washington. He is also Visiting Professor at the China Conservatory of Music in Beijing. He has held a residency at the Melba Conservatory of the University of Melbourne and done three tours of New Zealand. In addition, he is a frequent visitor to the Far East, including China, Japan, Korea and Singapore. Recently, he appeared at the Jerusalem Music Center, the Royal College of Music in London, and the Chetham's Summer School in Manchester, UK, performing the 24 Preludes and Fugues of Dmitry Shostakovich and giving masterclasses at all three venues. In Beijing, he has also given an all-Chopin recital at Tsinghua University, China's Harvard. In February of this year, he undertook a series of performances of Bach's *The Art of* Fugue, and in March he traveled again to Jerusalem and Beijing's Forbidden City to give performances of the Bach, in addition to masterclasses at the Hong Kong Academy of the Arts and China Conservatory, and an all-Chopin recital at the new concert hall in Tianjin.

Craig Sheppard was born in November, 1947, and raised outside Philadelphia. He graduated both the Curtis Institute of Music and the Juilliard School, where his teachers were Eleanor Sokoloff and Sasha Gorodnitzki. At the Marlboro Festival, he worked with both Rudolf Serkin and Pablo Casals, subsequently doing a tour with *Music from Marlboro*. Although a top prize winner in these early years at the Busoni, Ciani and

Rubinstein competitions, it was his Silver Medal at the 1972 Leeds International Piano Competition in the UK that initiated his international career. Moving to London in 1973 and residing there for the next twenty years, Sheppard continued his studies with Ilona Kabos, Peter Feuchwanger and Sir Clifford Curzon, and taught at Lancaster University, the Yehudi Menuhin School and the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. He performed on multiple occasions with all the major orchestras in the UK, as well as the Berlin Philharmonic and the La Scala orchestras on the European continent, with conductors such as Sir Georg Solti, James Levine, Michael Tilson Thomas, Aaron Copland, Esa-Pekka Salonen, Kurt Sanderling, David Zinman, Leonard Slatkin and Sir Andrew Davis. With Sir John Pritchard, he recorded the *Rachmaninoff 3rd Piano Concerto* with the London Philharmonic. In this country, he has appeared with the orchestras of Boston, Philadelphia, Chicago, San Francisco, Seattle, Atlanta, Dallas and Rochester, amongst others.

Sheppard is devoted to collaborative music, and over the years has worked with Wynton Marsalis, José Carreras, Victoria de los Angeles, Renato Bruson, Irina Arkhipova, Ida Handel, Sylvia Rosenberg, Mayumi Fujikawa, Lydia Mordkovich, James Ehnes, Johannes Moser, Edward Arron, Richard O'Neill, Yura Lee and the Emerson, Cleveland, Bartok, Chilingirian and Mirò String Quartets. For many years, he has been a frequent performer with the Seattle Chamber Music Society. The CDs from Sheppard's 1984

performance at Stockholm's *Berwaldhallen* with the great Polish-English violinist, Ida Handel, have been released recently by Weltblick Classics in Leipzig and Tokyo.

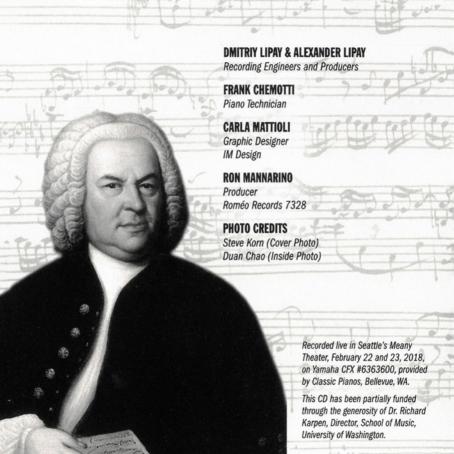
In 2010, Sheppard helped found the *Seattle Piano Institute* at the instigation of his colleague at the University of Washington, Dr. Robin McCabe. A boot camp for aspiring young pianists, the SPI completed its ninth highly successful year this past July. Please consult www.seattlepianoinstitute.org for additional info.

Sheppard records now exclusively for Romeo Records (www.romeorecords.com). Past recordings can be found on the EMI, CBS/Sony, Philips and AT-Berlin labels, amongst others.

More can be learned by visiting Sheppard's website, www.craigsheppard.net.



Kevin Korsyn earned his Ph.D. at Yale University and is Professor of Music Theory at the University of Michigan. His completion of Contrapunctus 14, the unfinished fugue from Bach's Die Kunst der Fuge, was published in Music Theory & Analysis in 2016 and has been widely performed. His book Decentering Music: A Critique of Contemporary Musical Research (Oxford University Press, 2003) was the subject of a symposium at the University of Ljubljana in 2009 and is now being translated into French; essays from this symposium were published in Approaches to Musical Research: Between Practice and Epistemology (Peter Lang, 2012). He has received awards for both research and teaching, including the Emerging Scholar Award from the Society for Music Theory for his article "Schenker and Kantian Epistemology," and the Distinguished Faculty Award from the Michigan Association of Governing Boards; in 2003 he was elected a Senior Fellow in the Michigan Society of Fellows. He was one of the founders of *Theoria*, a journal of historical music theory, and has remained on its editorial board since its inception; he has also served on the boards of other distinguished journals, including Music Theory Spectrum, MTO (Music Theory Online) and Indiana Theory Review. He has served on a number of award committees, including the Lewis Lockwood Award Committee, the Henry Russel Awards Committee, the AMS Publications Committee, the SMT Publication Awards Committee, and has worked as an advisor and referee for several foundations. His articles and reviews have appeared in a number of leading journals, including JAMS, Music Theory Spectrum, Music Analysis, Beethoven Forum, Intégral, The Musical Times, Theoria, Notes, and elsewhere.



the art of FUGUE

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