



Hermeneutik zu Johann Sebastian Bach



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Hermeneutics of Bach

Research and research results by Christoph Bossert

Feature 4 and 5

The symmetrical construction of the *36 chorales* - indication 2

Transition from end to new beginning - beginning and end of a piece - clues 3 and 4

Hermeneutics

instructional video in 12

features

with

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Feature 4

The symmetrical construction of the 36 chorales - indication 2

I now come to a second indication that we could or should actually call *Johann Sebastian Bach's chorales from the Neumeister collection 36 chorales*.

In fact, I myself am very surprised by this argument. It is the finding that pieces nos. 1, 11, 21 and 31 are in G major - note this beautiful sequence of numbers 1-11-21-31

— and thus, if we assume symmetry, pieces no. 6, 16, 26, 36 would then have to be in keys that can all be related to G major in a specific way. What could a relationship between G major and other keys look like?

— We can *put* the key of G major in the *minor*, then we get G minor;

— we can go from G minor to B flat major to the parallel key;

— In the same way we can go from G major to its parallel E minor.

Then, according to my findings, the pieces 6, 16, 26, 36 would be the symmetrical counterparts to Nos. 1, 11, 21, 31, for which the key of G major is obligatory. The symmetrical counterpart No. 6 is in G minor, No. 16 in B flat - let's say modern B flat major -, No. 26 - as explained in the previous feature - is in G major and No. 36 - also as previously explained - is in E minor, but then ends in E major. I consider the key constellation of G minor to B flat major, G major to E minor as No. 6 to 16 and 26 to 36 to be an astonishing finding. It could still pass as a coincidence. But now we realise that pieces nos. 9 and 10, as well as nos. 27 and 28 - i.e. the ninth and tenth as well as the tenth and ninth last pieces - make a very similar finding possible, namely on the basis of the key of D major.

Previously the basis was G major. Now it is exactly the same from D major: We can darken D major to D minor, to D minor we get the parallel key of F major or the parallel key of B minor. In fact, these pieces are in the following keys: No. 9 in D major, No. 10 in D minor, No. 27 in F major and No. 28 in B minor.



Formally, as if keys form a *dux* - on the basis of pieces 6, 16, 26, 36 (G minor to B flat major, G major to E minor), the keys D major, D minor, F major and B minor are now used in the answer at the D level. The key relationships are the same, only shifted by a fifth.



But what are pieces no. 9, 10 and 27, 28?

They regulate the division of the whole, i.e. all 36 chorales, into nine pieces each. The 9th closes the first quarter, the 10th opens the second quarter, No. 27 closes the third quarter and No. 28 opens the fourth quarter. We therefore have reason to look for this subdivision again as an inner - possibly also theological-semantic - subdivision of the cycle.

There is also another argument - attention! I am now making a huge leap.

I now refer to the cancellation of the *Art of Fugue* as one of Johann Sebastian Bach's last statements in his entire oeuvre¹ as well as to the key disposition of *ClavierÜbung* I and II.

If we take the relationship G major to E minor or G minor to B flat major as a basis, the following fundamental tones result: . *Piano Exercise I* moves within precisely this spectrum on the basis of its six keynotes of the six partitas: ; this is followed by *Piano Exercise II* in F major for the Italian Concerto and B minor for the French Overture. However, the Italian concerto has a second movement in D minor, the third in F major and is followed by the French overture in B minor.

Once again in other words:  is this sound, the fundamental tone sequence in *ClavierÜbung* I, followed by  as *ClavierÜbung* II. This is exactly what is present in the Neumeister chorales in the construct described.

Now, the termination of the art of the fuga. **KB 1, unfinished *Contrapunctus*:**



b-g-e-f
f-d-h-d

I think these parallels are obvious.²

¹ On the phrase "one of Johann Sebastian Bach's last utterances in his entire oeuvre":

a) The break in bars 238/239 [see NB 1] has only survived in Bach's autograph. It differs from the break in bar 233 of the first edition.

b) Bach's autograph of the final fragment of the *Art of Fugue* is written down in calligraphy - i.e. in the most beautiful script - and probably dates from around 1742, making it the starting point for Bach's work on the *Art of Fugue* and most likely serving as a conceptual and perspectival vanishing point ever since:

This work shall be cancelled!

² Ultimately, I see this as follows: It is about the compositional category of analogy formation on the basis of

a) of the root note order G-G-G-G to g-B-G-e of the *36 chorales* to the root note order B-G-e of *ClavierÜbung* I

b) the root note order D-d-F-b of the *36 chorales* to the root note order to F-d-F-b of *ClavierÜbung* II

c) the maximum compression of this as b'-g'-e'-g' to f'-d'-h'-d' in the interruption of the *art of the fugue*.

Feature 5

07: 50

In the 36 chorales: Transition from end to new beginning - Beginning and end of a piece - Indications 3 and 4 for a symmetry construct

In this fifth feature, I would like to offer a third and a fourth piece of evidence in favour of the question of whether what we in academia call *chorales by Johann Sebastian Bach from the Neumeister collection* are actually 36 chorales, even conceived in symmetry, so that there can be no doubt that we have a complete closed collection before us.

My third indication of symmetry is the category end and beginning or beginning and end. Which pieces do I mean?

There is an interesting ranking:

- the first, second and third last opposite
- the third, the second-last and the last piece.

Indication 3 (a): The chorales no. 1, 2 and 34

No. 1 *Der Tag der ist so freudenreich* BWV 719

No. 2 *Wir Christenleut han jetzund Freud* BWV 1090

No. 34 *Werde munter, mein Gemüte* BWV 1118

The first and last pieces have already been mentioned in detail; these pieces were mentioned on the basis of evidence 1 as well as evidence 2.

Piece 1 *The day that is so full of joy*. Now the focus is not on the beginning of the piece, but on the end of the first section compared to the beginning of the second section. The focus here is on the root note *G* in the lower register. This transition is structured as follows:

KB 1, No. 1 *Der Tag der ist so freudenreich* BWV 719, m. 27:



This is followed by the fugato that has already been mentioned.³ My point is that a new section begins after the low *G*. Let's listen to No. 2 in comparison.

3 See Feature 3

KB 2, No. 2 *Wir Christenleut* BWV 1090, m. 25:



The passage descends again to note G and a new section is then heard in a very fine manner. Now my thesis:

The first, second and third-last pieces should be related to each other. The rule is that there must be a transition from one part to another. This transition is given in bar 4 to 5 in no. 34.

KB 3, No. 34 *Become lively, my spirit* BWV 1118:



I will now show this in its entire context from bar 1 of this piece. It is called *Werde munter mein Gemüte*. The triplet movement in the transition in the second piece (**KB 2**) is very similar. I think there is no doubt about the similarity. So now the first group has been described with the first, second and third-last pieces.⁴

Indication 3 (b): The chorales no. 3, 35 and 36

No. 3 *Das alte Jahr vergangen ist* BWV 1091

No. 35 *Wie nach einer Wasserquelle* BWV
1119

No. 36 *Christ, who art the bright day* BWV 1120

Now I will give the proof for the third, the second last and the last piece. It is again a coherent group, structurally characterised in this case by beginning and end. The first group was about endings and beginnings, but as a transition from one part to a new one


⁴ Criterion: End of a first section with low note G and new beginning as a *fugato* (no. 1) or as section 2 in 12/8 (no. 2, no. 34).

Part. Now it is the beginning of a piece and the end of a piece for the group of the third, the second last and the last piece.

The third piece is the chorale prelude *Das alte Jahr vergangen ist*.


KB 4a:



As inconspicuous as it is: ; but that is the point of the beginning, because the end

is called **KB 4b** as follows:



So  of the beginning became the



end of this piece.

Now the second-last and the last piece. We have already mentioned the third-last piece. The second-last piece is called *Wie nach einer Wasserquelle* (BWV 1119),

KB 5a:



To understand this muffled sound, I have to keep talking:

*As a deer cries out for fresh water from a spring, so my soul thirsts for
you.*

KB 5b:



The motif at the beginning of the chorale line or the *cantus firmus* entry of the second-last piece correlates evidently with these last-mentioned words. Now comes the end of the last piece; I play the last three bars:

KB 6a:



To summarise: **KB 6b-e**:

The third piece begins with



and ends with



The second last piece begins with



and the last piece ends with



We discussed the following pieces: The first, second and third last as well as the third, second last and last piece. From this, I have now developed the following categories in Indices 3 (a and b) for the proof of symmetry:

- A statement of the transition of something that is passing away, combined with a low point *G*, which is always set in transition and from which something new can be opened up.
- Another group in which the beginning of a piece and the end of a piece are *c o n n e c t e d*.

Indication 4: The chorales no. 4 and no. 33

No. 4 *Herr Gott, nun schleuß den Himmel auf* BWV 1092

No. 33 *Mach's mit mir, Gott, nach deiner Güt'* BWV 957

In Indication 4, I would like to show that in piece 4 and in the fourth-last piece, special features can be observed - not to say: something absolutely extraordinary can be observed here. In another context, this leads me to speak of a *major challenge* here n.⁵ In another context of Features, I speak of *five great challenges*, and the fourth-last piece, *Mach's mit mir, Gott, nach deiner Güt'*, becomes the *first great challenge* for me to talk about Bach's hermeneutics in principle. What do I mean by that?

5 I use the term "*great challenge*" when the compositional intensification of rule-breaking can be observed in Bach.

No. 4 begins with a fragmented first chorale line. It actually reads:

KB 7a:



and means the song *Herr Gott, nun schließ den Himmel auf*. In the fragmented version, only the first two chords are heard at the beginning - then in the echo - now the continuation.

KB 7b:




We only find out what the chorale line is actually called in the third step. The echo relationship is decisive for steps 1 and 2: something that sounds in a higher register is repeated an octave lower as an echo. This echo pattern also recurs from time to time in the rest of the piece.

The fourth-last piece has a completely different character. So on the face of it, you wouldn't necessarily think of a symmetrical relationship:

KB 8a:



The Soggetto is a reworking of the first chorale line and reads: . This is answered by the second voice an octave lower (**KB 8b**):



This is therefore comparable to No. 4 (**KB 7b**). There the descant opens; the echo sounds an octave lower. Now comes the entry of the third voice, which, however, does not communicate the theme but represents something completely new:

KB 8c:



The fact that this third voice now presents a completely new, as it were abrupt, new thought becomes a *great challenge* for me: because it really shouldn't! The

It should not, above all because this very piece also exists in a copy with the title *Fuga*. In a three-part fuga, the third voice must not enter completely differently from the actual theme.

So in what way does a very young Johann Sebastian Bach - according to this view — the fourth and the fourth last piece?

A fragmented chorale beginning is worked as an octave-displaced echo in No. 4. After two beginnings, the third *actual chorale emerges* from this as the opening. In the fourth-last piece, a soggetto begins, which is answered an octave lower in the second voice - instead of the usual fifth answer. A third voice then enters completely unexpectedly and brings the whole thing to a close.

This gives rise to very far-reaching thoughts. I would like to use the metaphor that this is about the *step beyond*. In No. 4, it is the step beyond fragmentation into the whole; in the fourth-last piece, the theme is presented as it should be, but the answer is given an octave lower and a third, completely new one forms the conclusion - a *step beyond* leads as a third step into something new.


The theological metaphor is - I think - clear: it is about the third step; the *third Step* would be:

Et resurrexit tertia die - Christ rose from the dead on the third day! And this melody

 makes this clear.

But there is also another finding that is able to emphasise the whole thing theologically. I am now entering the difficult terrain of numbers. If I assume that the *36 chorales* form a unit, then it could also play a role in which bar in the overall structure we have reached at some point. In the case of the fourth-last piece [No. 33] and its answer in the low octave, we have reached the total bar 1335 - and this number makes me sit up and take notice. It is a curious fact that in the Bible, in the book of Daniel, the penultimate sentence of the entire book of Daniel says the following: "*Blessed is he who waits and reaches one thousand three hundred and thirty-five days. Now, Daniel, go and rest until the end comes, when you will be resurrected to your inheritance at the end of days.*" (Daniel 12, 12/13).

I have just spoken of the resurrection: The third and the new, the *step beyond*, *et resurrexit tertia die* - an ascending line that begins completely unexpectedly

; these are already indications, without me ever having thought of the number 1335. But now I think that the arguments support each other. The moment the


second voice enters in the lower register, the total time signature is 1335. If I now run this in parallel with the Book of Daniel, the result is as follows: Total bar 1335 reads:

KB 8d-j: Now  I'm one step ahead:

The musical notation shows a piano piece with a treble and bass clef. The treble clef has a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a time signature of 1335. The bass clef has a key signature of one sharp (F#). The piece starts with a treble clef rest and a bass clef eighth-note pattern.

Now Daniel, go and rest until the end comes:
key the piece says 26:

 In this

 but the piece remains 33
here in A


 minorand leaves

the third voice is used completely unexpectedly:



For me, the parallel setting means:

— *Blessed is he who waits and reaches one thousand three hundred and thirty-five days*
for a total cycle time of 1335

— one bar later: *Now Daniel, go and rest until the end comes,* 
— *you will be resurrected to your inheritance at the end of days:*



So that would be my thesis for what could actually be captured in these short, concise musical elements in the Bible in a comprehensive sense. Therefore, in my opinion, I have good reason to speak here of the 'step beyond' and thus - starting from the breaking of the rule - to see a statement about the resurrection from the dead and to assign it the category of the "great challenge".

Conclusio and Definitions of terms

What do I have to say about what I would now like to call the 36 chorales?

1. The 36 chorales are Bach's first major compositional compendium
2. There are common characteristics between individual pieces. On the basis of such characteristics, we can create an association that ultimately even allows us to recognise symmetrical relationships. I call these common characteristics that connect pieces *signatures*. These *signatures* are linked to the respective contexts of one or more pieces. Hermeneutic statements result from the linking of word, sound and number - the example just mentioned is truly paradigmatic here.
3. I call a symmetrically located group of pieces, in each of which a *signature* defines a clear commonality, a *family*. We have come to know such families: e.g:
 - Family 1-11-26-36
 - Family 1-11-21-31 compared to 6-16-26-36
 - Family 9/10 opposite 27/28
 - or now in the case of the third index: Family of the first, second and third last piece compared to the third, second last and last piece
 - or indication 4: the fourth and the fourth last piece
 As all 36 pieces can be assigned to such *families* - I will provide full proof of this in another film, so much can be said in advance⁶ -there is little doubt that this compositional compendium has survived in its entirety.
4. I call a group that exhibits the characteristic of unity a *work unit*. Thus, if the 36 chorales are indeed Bach's first major compositional compendium, they would also be the first *work unit* in Bach's oeuvre n.⁷
5. In the fourth-last chorale of the 36 chorales, there is a blatant breach of the rules in the first appearance of the third voice. Semantically and hermeneutically, I attribute this breach to the compositional depiction of the resurrection.

Structurally, I am talking about

Breaking the rules - '*step beyond*' - big challenge.

Thesis: This three-step is an essential and superordinate category in Bach's *Componere*.

Sheet music examples used (edited)

⁶ See DVVLIO homepage < <https://innovation-orgellehre.digital/> >

⁷ The number 36 = 6 x 6 is called the *signum perfectionis*, because the number 6 is the first *numerus perfectus*. As the two final sections in the first line of each chorale indicate the topoi of *source* and *light*, I also assume that the young Bach is referring here to Psalm 36, which states: "*For with you is the source of life and in your light we see the light.*"

Tobi's music archive:

Johann Sebastian BACH, organ chorales from the Neumeister Collection, No. 11 *Aus tiefer Not schrei ich zu dir* BWV 1099, No. 26 *Nun lass uns den Leib begraben* BWV 1111, No. 36 *Christe, der du bist der helle Tag* BWV 1120. URL: < <https://tobis-notenarchiv.de/wp/bach-archiv/> > and < <https://tobis-notenarchiv.de/wp/bach-archiv/ergaenzungen/orgelchoraele-der-neumeister-sammlung/> >

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