Bartel, Dietrich. *Musica Poetica: Musical-Rhetorical Figures in German Baroque Music.* University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, Nebraska, 1997. (ISBN 0-8032-1276-3. xv+471 pages. $50 cloth.)

Writers from antiquity through modern times have often claimed that music speaks to audiences: "The instrumentalist is an orator who speaks an unarticulated language."[1] Johann Sebastian Bach reminded his students the each musical part should behave like "persons who conversed together as if in a select company."[2] Many famous musicians specifically compare language and music: "We can think comparatively about music and language, and maybe even have some terminology in common, . . . [we will] see how his [Chomsky's] principles can be applied to music."[3] Not only does music suggest linguistic analogs and convey emotional content, it also affects the soul and even encourages ethical (or immoral) behavior: ". . . it is plain that music has the power of producing a certain effect on the moral character of the soul. . . ."[4] Probably the most influential writer on late Renaissance and Baroque Germany, Martin Luther promoted music's abilities, establishing it as secondary but nearly equal to the Word: "After theology, I accord to music the highest place and the greatest honour."[5] These exhortations and anecdotes not only testify to music's strong powers, but also suggest that music possesses linguistic qualities.

Demonstrating a specific correspondence between language and music poses its own set of difficulties. During the Baroque periods, *musica poetica* attempted to use principles of rhetoric to describe and explain some of music's magic. With such an understanding, composers and performers hoped to summon listeners' passions and, when appropriate, to move them to belief in and greater understanding of the holy Word.

Martin Luther emphasized the delivery of the Word in sermons, thereby encouraging the inclusion of rhetoric in Lutheran school curricula and in Protestant sermons. His recognition of the power of music in service of the Word quickly led later writers to more explicit connections between the disciplines of music and rhetoric. Also, *musica poetica* implicitly intertwined the doctrine of affections with three concepts borrowed from antiquity.[6] Rational thinking during the

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[1]Igor Stravinsky, *Poetics of Music in the Form of Six Lessons* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), 128.

[2]Hans T. David and Arthur Mendel, *The Bach Reader: A Life of Johann Sebastian Bach in Letters and Documents*, revised with supplement (New York: W. W. Norton, Inc., 1966), 38.

[3]Leonard Bernstein, *The Unanswered Question: Six Talks at Harvard* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 65.

[4]From Aristotle, *Politics*, in Oliver Strunk, *Source Readings in Music History: Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (New York: W. W. Norton, Inc., 1965), 19. Also see Plato, *Republic*, in Strunk, *Source*, p. 8.

[5]Walter Buszin, *Luther on Music*, ed. J. Riedel (Saint Paul: Lutheran Society for Worship, Music and the Arts, 1958), 11.

[6]The discipline of *musica poetica* developed out of three fields/concepts from antiquity that either survived in medieval scholasticism or resurfaced with Renaissance humanism: (1) rhetoric, (2) Pythagorean ratios and cosmological conceptions of music, and (3) the doctrine of ethos. Ancient rhetoric explained how speeches could be composed, organized, and embellished with figures of speech in order to persuade a listener to a

Baroque had led to further development of a "doctrine" of affections that explained emotions in a mechanistic way, e.g. Descartes' *Les Passions de l'âme* (1649).

To the seventeenth-century mind, it seemed plausible that the complicated and logical aggregation of ideas would arouse the affections. The process of writing music supposedly followed steps analogous to writing speeches, yielding a similar form. Likewise, musical figures affected listeners like figures of speech, summoning listeners' passions through the bodily mechanisms specified in the doctrine of affections.

Major composers, such as Dietrich Buxtehude and Bach, may have been influenced by this contemporaneous thoughts. Furthermore, these theories can be used to understand their works, especially passages that elude more modern theories. (One can easily think of seemingly illogical or even whimsical *stylus fantasticus* that produces a clearly rhetorical effect.) As belief in the doctrine of affections, rhetoric, and cosmological conceptions gave way to natural expression and other beliefs that arose during the classical and later periods, *musica poetica* disappeared from common discourse. In other words, these theories apply primarily to German Baroque music, a repertory that organists frequently perform.

Although the full title *Musica Poetica: Musical-Rhetorical Figures in German Baroque Music* correctly indicates that Bartel devotes most of the book to musical figures, it is seriously misleading because the term *musica poetica* is <u>not</u> synonymous with musical-rhetorical figures. Rather, *musica poetica* describes the methods and materials of musical composition, in which figures may be employed.[7] Also, this discipline can be used to explain how music can affect the listener. Describing the art of musical composition and demonstrating explicit relationships between language and music are not Bartel's goals, unlike authors cited in Bartel's bibliography. Bartel instead provides a tremendous compilation of musical figures, a wonderful reference tool. These descriptions of figures along with the background of the first four chapters only imply such musical-rhetorical relationships that would affect musical composition.

Bartel's text divides into three main parts: (1) four chapters of historical and philosophical background, (2) summaries of other historical author's treatises, and (3) definitions of musical-rhetorical figures. In Part I, the first chapter heavily emphasizes Luther's views on music and their relationship to the constituent factors of rhetoric, affections, and ethos. According to Bartel and his former teacher Eggebrecht, Luther's influence explains why *musica poetica* developed principally in Germany—a well-motivated and widely-shared historical theory that may be hard to prove definitely.[8] The second chapter introduces the field of *musica poetica* and its development. In the third chapter, Bartel summarizes the concept of affections and its connection with music in

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particular opinion or judgement (primarily in the political realm). Pythagorean ratios illustrated the beauty of mathematics in the elements of musical sound. These ratios related music to the cosmos, the human soul, and sound. The doctrine of ethos stated that music affects the morality of listeners.

[7]In many treatises, these theories developed as a pedagogical device to aid composition and performance. Furthermore, "the meaning of these disciplines [*musica theorica*, *musica poetica*, *musica practica*] must not be interpreted in the modern sense of the terms. . . . *practica* [refers] not to 'expressive music,' as many modern writers believe, but to the art of composition (the word is derived from the Greek meaning 'to create.' Modern music theory . . . comprises essentially only what would be called in the baroque *musica poetica*" (Manfred Bukofzer, *Music in the Baroque Era, from Monteverdi to Bach*, 370). Also see Bukofzer, 388. And, also read Stravinsky, *Poetics*, p. 4.

[8]Bartel, *Musica Poetica*, ix.

sufficient detail, including the effects of tempo, meter, intervals, harmony (dissonance), and keys. For instance, the emotion of love involves a "combination of longing & joy—unstable; calm tempo; rhythm sometimes fast and slow; contrasting intervals reflecting longing & joy."[9] The fourth chapter discusses principles of rhetoric, the evolution of its purpose, and how German music theorists gradually adopted nearly all rhetoric's precepts. (For those with only a passing interest in the subject, more concise information can be found in other sources.[10])

Part II imparts a good sense of individual historical authors' contributions in wonderfully brief and easy-to-read summaries. Theorists' biographies found in *The New Grove* provide more background than Bartel's do, but usually they contain less and occasionally different information about each author's involvement with *musica poetica*, which is Bartel's focus. Bartel's longer and engaging summaries compare and contrast authors while supporting his views on the development of *musica poetica*.

Although *musica poetica* might describe how some Baroque listeners generally thought about music, the approach, methods, and details of particular theorists seem to follow individual paths. For instance, Burmeister focused on sections of music, mainly divided by texture and the words. Bernhard focused on tiny dissonances as musical figures that embellish basic voice-leading. And only until the late Baroque did Mattheson push the rhetorical models of Quintilian upon musical form. (Because of the different theories presented by authors, we now talk of plural *Figurelehren*.) The most systematic studies employing modern musicological methods were begun with Schering (1908) and bloomed through the 1960s. One can infer from Bartel's bibliography that most scholars' enthusiasm for *musica poetica* has waned, but certainly ample truth lies in *musica poetica*'s precepts and its applicability to the music of the Baroque periods, probably the most important repertory to organists.

I still believe that treatises themselves rather than summaries are the best resource for understanding *musica poetica*. Through these primary sources, one obtains some sense of what issues were important to Baroque musicians, how they formulate questions, and most importantly, how they solved problems. Summaries often lose the magic of primary sources. (Less dedicated readers could go to the entries in *The New Grove*.) Numerous footnotes cite support from primary sources in the original language, German. Bartel's information on Martin Luther, however, is compiled from modern secondary sources, primarily surveys in English.

In Part III, Bartel wisely lists all figures in alphabetical order, a convenient choice. (The appendixes list figures categorized by different criteria, fulfilling any reader's needs.) Each entry begins with a brief definition and Bartel's short discussion of origin and development of the term. A few purely rhetorical definitions are included as well. Bartel's intent in Part III is to "explore the origin, development and understanding of a term. . . ."[11] The remainder of each entry contains a wonderful compilation of quotations (with translations) by every major author listed in chronological order. Bartel includes all the musical examples from historical treatises. Bartel has compiled a quick and wonderful reference tool.

I urge readers to examine the primary sources as a whole because this sort of presentation

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[9]Athanasius Kircher as summarized in Bartel, 37.

[10]See (1) *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 1980 ed., S.v. "Rhetoric and music" by George J. Buelow, or (2) Leon W. Couch III, "Musical Rhetoric in Three Präeludia of Dietrich Buxtehude," *The Diapason*, March 2000, 14-15.

[11]Bartel, *Musica Poetica*, xii.

loses the context of each historical author's complete discussion of figures.[12] Furthermore, the treatises are fairly easy to understand. The discourse and questions of Baroque theorists can be fascinating as well as enlightening. Furthermore, translations of the major treatises usually contain large and informative prefaces that summon a large scope of musical and rhetorical issues, summarize the author's contributions in even greater depth, and discuss theoretical problems and unfamiliar terms.

Bartel's text contains four time-saving appendixes: (1) a summary of figures with brief definitions, (2) a list of figures by rhetorical-musical categories, loosely following Buelow's article "Rhetoric and Music" in *The New Grove*, (3) a list of figures sorted by author/treatise, and (4) a list of authors with their musical figures.

The comprehensive bibliography, sorted into convenient categories, is certainly worth investigating. Bartel first arranges the entries into rhetorical and musical sources. The first category contains writers such as Cicero and Quintilian, while the second category lists theorists such as Bernhard, Burmeister, and Mattheson. Each of these two main categories are further subdivided into primary and secondary sources.

For the price of $50, Bartel's *Musica Poetica* is a good buy. It represents a great deal of effort and may save much time for future researchers. The text avoids dense, academic prose, but packs in information on the development of *musica poetica* and the contributions of individual Baroque writers in addition to its comprehensive list of musical-rhetorical figures with quotations from nearly every historical treatise. Colleges and universities offering history of theory courses, strong early music studies, or graduate organ programs should consider purchasing this reference book. Individuals seriously pursuing the study of *musica poetica* will want to own Bartel's text, while others may wish to simply read about the fascinating subject through Bartel's interesting narrative. I have read the entire book three times already.

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[12] Secondary sources, even when attempting faithful summaries, often interpret historical documents by borrowing anachronistic concepts and attempting to answer modern questions. For instance, the Bernhard treatise seems pregnant with Schenkerian concepts, but the theoretical concepts had not yet been born. (The English translation of Bernhard's treatise appeared in the Schenkerian publication *Music Forum.*) Fortunately, Bartel lets authors speak for themselves in the translations in the third part, but his helpful discussions do further his theories on the origins, growth and decline of *musica poetica*. Seemingly benign and convincing, it still is a modern interpretation of history. Such a historical evolution of ideas probably did not seem so smooth and logical to those at the time. (Authors in the Baroque period differed on their intent and solutions.)