

Chapter 5

Instrumentation

Of the thirty pieces contained in the 1658 Lustgarten, eighteen have instrumental parts.⁴⁸ Ahle uses violins, trombones, recorders, bassoons, and low strings, and through his use of instruments, proves himself as a text-driven composer. In both his choices of instruments and how he writes for them, Ahle appears to mirror the text, and in some places, encourage a certain reading of it. He does this through three instrumental strategies - using instruments for punctuation, using sinfonias to set an affect for the piece, and adding or subtracting instruments for textural shifts. While he often uses a combination of these techniques in any given piece, the pieces discussed below offer the best representations of particular methods.

The most easily noticeable way in which Ahle uses instruments is as punctuation. Not unlike cadences in recitatives of Bach or Handel, Ahle often adds instrumental echoes of sung phrases, which mirror the rhythms of the text. The smallest scale this happens on is phrase by phrase, such as in “Unser Herr Jesus Christus” (No. 14). The piece is scored for five strings and alto, and every phrase sung is repeated back by the strings. Often, but not always, the top violin is repeating the melody just sung. By doing this, Ahle almost repeats the text twice, placing special emphasis on the gravity of the words (in this case, the Words of Institution – central to the communion liturgy, though rarely set to music).

⁴⁸ As previously discussed, in the preface to his 1658 collection, Ahle offers a variety of suggestions for performances with smaller forces – omitting sinfonias, violins, cappellas, or other instruments – but the parts were printed, presumably with the intention of being performed. I have therefore considered the pieces as they would be complete, with all parts being used.

In “Ich wil den Herren loben” (No. 12), Ahle sets only one verse of Psalm 34: “I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth.”⁵⁰ The piece is scored for three vocal soloists and two violins, but introduces trumpets and a cappella four times over the course of the piece, for large celebratory cadences.

Violins

Cantus
Altus

Bassett.

B.C.

6

6

Violins

Trombetti

C.
A.

B.

Capell.

B.C.

7 6 6 3 4 3

While this doesn't serve to highlight specific elements of the text, it portrays the jubilation with which the Lord should be praised – both the suddenness of the interjections and the choice of the brash trumpets serve the affect of the piece.

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In his Magnificat for low voices and trombones (No. 22), Ahle does the same thing – while the trombones play occasional sinfonias, they are largely there to contribute to the closing measures (and sometimes the opening ones) of each verse. After (often florid) figural music for the majority of the verse, the trombones join for longer note values repeating the last sung phrase. While there is no mention of *capellen* for this piece anywhere, the trombone parts have text printed in these final passages, suggesting that the trombones could either be replaced or augmented with singers.

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Alt. et san - - ctum no-men e - jus, et san - - ctum no-men, san - ctum no-men e -

Ten. san - ctum no-men e - jus, san-ctum no-men e - jus, et san - - ctum no-men e -

Bas. et san - - ctum no-men e - jus, et san - - ctum no-men e -

B.C. 6 6 7 6 6 5 3

86

Tbn. I et san - - ctum no - men, no - men

Tbn. II et san - - ctum no - men, sanc-tum no - men e - - jus

Tbn. III et san - - ctum no - men, no - men

Tbn. IV et san - - ctum no - men, no - men

A. jus, et san - - ctum, san - ctum no - men e - - jus.

T. jus, et san - - ctum no - men e - - jus.

B. jus, et san - - ctum no - men e - - - - - jus.

B.C. 6 6 6 3

Figure 11 - "Magnificat" (No. 22, Lustgarten II), mm. 82 - 91.

The trombone is featured heavily in Ahle's 1658 collection – they appear in five of the eighteen pieces with instruments, second only to the appearance of violins. The prevalence of the trombone in German sacred music of the seventeenth century is well documented, and can partly be traced back to a mis-

translation – while most English versions of the Bible translate various Hebrew and Greek words to “Trumpet,” Luther translated some of them as “Posaune” – leading to composers featuring trombones in sacred concertos quite frequently.⁵¹ Charlotte Leonard, in both her dissertation and articles for the *Historic Brass Society Journal*, has discussed extensively the affect of the trombone in seventeenth century German sacred music, particularly that of Thuringia and Saxony.⁵² Leonard differentiates between places where the trombone is used for a joyful affect, or for majesty (results of Luther’s translation), and those in which it is used in a “low choir” situation, allowing for affects of depth, darkness, or sadness.

Ahle’s Magnificat (No. 22) takes full advantage of the royal connotations of the trombone – using the full compliment of brass and voices for “and the rich,” before using scattered voices for “he has sent away.” The passage continues with “empty,”⁵³ which is set three times – first with the full forces, then only the singers, and finally only one voice. This is designated “echo” in the continuo part, and the altus part has a “piano” marking.⁵⁴ While this is undeniably an attempt at word painting, the way in which Ahle writes also

⁵¹ David M. Guion, *Trombone, Its History and Music, 1697-1811* (New York: Gordon & Breach, 1988), 151-153.

⁵² Charlotte A. Leonard, “The role of the trombone and its *Affekt* in the Lutheran church music of seventeenth-century Saxony and Thuringia: The mid- and late seventeenth century,” in *Historic Brass Society Journal* 12 (New York: Historic Brass Society 2000), 161-209, and “The Role of the Trombone and Its Affekt in the Lutheran Church Music of the Seventeenth-century Saxony and Thuringia.” Dissertation, Duke University, 1997.

⁵³ The whole line reads: “Et divites dimisit inanes,” “and the rich he hath sent empty away.”

⁵⁴ This is only one of several examples in which Ahle uses an echo effect. The only dynamic markings in the parts are used for this technique.

punctuates the text and brings special attention to a certain element – the idea of the rich being sent away, and fading in the distance.

While this displays a detail-oriented focus on the text, Ahle's use of instruments was also interested in the larger picture. The second way in which Ahle regularly features instruments in *Lustgarten II* is to set an affect for a piece or a section. Leonard uses "Erschienen ist" (No. 29) as an example for this – "associations between timbre and text are used to highlight multiple textual contrasts within one piece, as well as for larger structural purposes."⁵⁵ In particular, she highlights the contrast between a trombone prelude with chains of suspensions and dissonances, which "emphasize death and despair," and the trombone accompaniment to the tenor solo, with warlike oscillating triads, which "help him celebrate Christ's victory over death."⁵⁶

I find the trombone used in a similar manner in "Herr nun lässestu deinen Diener" (No. 11), Ahle's setting of the Song of Simeon, in which he opts to write for bass and four trombones. The canticles text is a journey from darkness into light – so Ahle creates darkness by using a low choir of instruments, and the lowest singing voice. The piece opens with an ominous sinfonia, which makes use of long lines and slow moving harmonies.

⁵⁵ Leonard, Article, 180-183.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

The image displays a musical score for five instruments: Tbn. I, Tbn. II, Tbn. III, Tbn. IV, and B.C. (Bassoon/Contrabass). The score is written in 3/4 time and consists of two systems. The first system shows the initial measures with various note values and rests. The second system continues the piece, featuring more complex rhythmic patterns and fingerings. The notation includes standard musical symbols such as clefs, time signatures, and note heads, along with specific performance instructions like fingerings (e.g., 6, #, 5, 6, #, 6) and articulation marks.

Figure 12 - "Herr nun lässest du deinen Diener" (No. 11, Lustgarten II), mm. 1-17.

After setting this opening affect, the writing becomes more jubilant as the text becomes more optimistic. For the text "meine Augen/ my eyes," the singer begins to sing upward scales, which the trombones echo, representing the eyes beginning to open. This leads to a jubilant triple, celebrating the eyes having seen the salvation of the Lord, for all people. The trombones (and the voice) regain their regal nature for two statements of "ein licht/ a light," before returning to jaunty sixteenth note runs for "und zum Preiß deines Volkkes Israel/ and the glory of thy people Israel." Throughout the entire piece, Ahle uses the trombones to contrast light and dark, jubilation and majesty.

In some of his pieces, however, Ahle chose to use different combinations of instruments in different passages, to set different affects. The most striking examples of this can be found two of his Magnificat settings (Nos. 19 and 20). In No. 20, a setting of the text in German, Ahle has divided the piece into the eleven verses, each accompanied by instruments. Two violins accompany many of the verses, but four of them feature other instruments. For example, the second verse is accompanied by two violas: "*...for he hath regarded the low estate of his*

handmaiden: for behold from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.”⁵⁷

Aside from the obvious result of violas having a “lower” tessitura than violins, Ahle has represented God looking on his servant with favor by inverting the voices. Previously, the accompanying instruments had been above all the voices, yet now, as this verse is set as a soprano solo, the instruments are below the voice – exemplifying the holiness of the humble servant.

Figure 13 - "Meine Seele erhebet" (No. 20, Lustgarten II), mm. 31-36.

The fourth verse (*“And his mercy is on them that fear him: from generation to generation.”*) is preceded by a sinfonia for four trombones. As with previous examples, the trombones are used for an affect of darkness and fear, but with overtones of majesty. After an opening chain of 7-6 suspensions, the harmonies arrive optimistically on a B-Major chord – which turns out merely to be a stopping point on the way to F#-major. In this way, the shadow-like nature of the suspensions leads the way to more royal harmony – perhaps Ahle’s way of depicting a God merciful to the faithful.

Figure 14 - "Meine Seele erhebet" (No. 20, Lustgarten II), mm. 70-77.

⁵⁷ Translation of German Magnificat “Meine seele erhebet” drawn from *Luther’s Works* vol 53. ed. Ulrich S. Leupold (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965), 178-9.

The seventh verse of the Magnificat (*"He hath filled the hungry with good things: and the rich he hath sent empty away."*) makes for an interesting study in how instrumentation can affect our reading of the text. In No. 20, Ahle begins with a sinfonia for two recorders, which might almost be described as pastoral. This could be seen to represent the contented nature of the hungry who have been fed – and while this may seem like a simplistic analysis, Ahle has clearly opted not to represent the groaning hungry, as he has in No. 19, where the same verse is set with a pair of trombones. Their opening chain of 6-5 suspensions seems to represent a spiritual (or even literal) hunger. The stark contrasts in the setting of this text lead to drastically different hearings of the text.

147

Tbn.

Tbn.

BC

6 6 5 6 6 5

4

166 *Sinfonia*

Fl. 1

Fl. 2

Sinfonia

BC

7 6 5 4 4

4

Figure 15 – “Magn. I. Toni.” (No. 19, Lustgarten II), mm. 147-154 (above) and “Meine Seele erhebet” (No. 20, Lustgarten II), mm. 166-171 (below).

While the Magnificats display Ahle's desire to set an affect, a much more literal narrative could be found in No. 28, "Fürchtet euch nicht." Friedrich Blume writes on this piece: "his humorous scene depicting the proclamation to the shepherds, in which four bassoons represent the grumbling, tenderhearted,

jovial peasants, is a masterful realization, in spite of its narrow confines.”⁵⁸

Perhaps humorous, but worth a closer look – Ahle uses the bassoons for more than comic relief. The piece opens with a homophonic sinfonia, with little harmonic interest; setting the scene of the peaceful pasture from the passage of Luke that Ahle is about to bring to life. Following a soprano solo announcing the birth, the choir of upper voices joins to sing of peace on earth, after which the low voice choir enters singing, “Let us go to Bethlehem,”⁵⁹ and then the bassoons return. This time, their sinfonia is less homophonic – with nearly constant running quarters. Harmonically, it is also slightly less stable. More than merely representing shepherds, Ahle’s bassoons are depicting apprehensive shepherds in movement. Upon their arrival in Bethlehem, the low voice choir (the shepherds) burst into a rousing chorale, with the bassoons mostly *colla parte*. This brings the story to a close. It may be layering modern taste onto Ahle’s music to assign the sinfonias this much programmatic meaning, but Ahle was certainly setting affect in his instrumental writing in this piece, and possibly more.

The bassoons may be unique, but Ahle’s most frequently used instruments are (unsurprisingly) violins. Fourteen of the eighteen pieces include a pair of violins, and five of those include only violins in addition to the voices. Two of those pieces “Herr Gott, mein Heiland” (No. 4) and “Christ Lag in Todes Banden” (No. 15) demonstrate Ahle’s use of instruments for a textural shift in his smaller scale pieces. “Herr Gott” opens as a bass solo. The text (from Psalm 88) is penitential – the singer cries night and day for God, his soul is wretched, and

⁵⁸ Blume, 232.

⁵⁹ Lasset uns nun gehen gen Bethlehem.”

he lives in constant pain. The text shifts, however, to a verse from Psalm 86:

“Show me a sign of your favor, so that those who hate me may see it and be put to shame, because you, Lord, have helped me and comforted me.”⁶⁰ Ahle adds the two violins for this passage (and the remainder of the piece), which creates a textural juxtaposition between the pain of the first part and the trust and hope of the second. This juxtaposition is heightened by the shift from a harmonically ambiguous area (which leads to an E minor cadence) to a stable C major opening, with the violins.

Figure 16 - "Herr Gott mein Heiland" (No. 4, Lustgarten II), mm. 52-70.

In “Christ Lag in Todes Banden” Ahle does close to the same thing. For the first two lines of the piece (“Christ lay in the snares of death/ And has given Himself for our sins;”⁶¹) the four voices sing figural entrances of Luther’s melody for sixty bars before the violins enter. The violins enter with a four bar sinfonia, and the text continues through the rest of the verse:

*He is risen again, And has brought us Life;
For this we should be joyful, Praise God and be grateful to Him,
And sing ‘Alleluia’.
Alleluia!*

⁶⁰ Psalm 86:17, NRSV.

⁶¹ Translation: Richard Jones in Alfred Dürr, *The Cantatas of J.S. Bach* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

Ahle's addition of florid violin parts which lead the transition through this passage draws attention to the joy in the remainder of Luther's text, as opposed to the darkness of the opening lines. This is especially important in a chorale-based piece like "Christ Lag," as the music for the opening is repeated. Ahle needed to find a way to express the joy of Christ's resurrection, without changing the melodic structure of the chorale.

Returning to another chorale-based piece, "Erschienen ist der herrliche Tag" (No. 29) uses textural shifts to highlight the textual differences between verses in a chorale. While Leonard has identified the different affects set by the trombones, it's important to also notice that Ahle uses two violins and three trombones in opposition to each other. Each of the four vocal soloists sings a verse of Herman's chorale, accompanied or introduced by these instruments. The opening verse, in the Cantus part, is accompanied by spritely violins, which reflect the optimistic and celebratory nature of the text - "The glorious day has appeared/ When no one may rejoice enough..."⁶² This is followed by a trombone interjection, setting up the alto verse, which is filled with pain and suffering.⁶³ Part way through the verse, however, the violins reappear for the text describing Jesus's rising from the dead.⁶⁴ In this way, Ahle manages to easily portray a text with such quick shifts in emotion.

In "Ich hab's gewagt" (No. 27), Ahle uses different instrumentations to divide the text into two sections – one accompanied by strings, and one by recorders. The text itself doesn't call for a division – a cohesive poem about God

⁶² Trans. in Leonard, Article, 180.

⁶³ "Die sünd und Tod, die Hell, all Jammer, Angst und noht.."

⁶⁴ "Hat überwunden Jesus Christ, der heut vom Tod erstanden ist."

protecting a marriage – but with Ahle’s division and insertion of sinfonias, he sets apart the second half.

*I have dared and promised,
to live in marriage with her.
May God, by his grace,
give us happiness and blessings.*

*As we both, in love and sorrow,
faithfully together remain,
Letting dear God rule in what comes
to happen to us in marriage.*

The first half uses the same music, repeated twice, while the second half is through composed.⁶⁵ This already sets apart the second half – it breaks the predicted pattern established by the initial repeat. By the nature of using an ensemble of recorders, the second half is accompanied by an ensemble in a much higher in pitch range than the voices, and much higher than the preceding strings. This could be seen as representing the presence of God above all – the text refers to God’s constant presence in the marriage.⁶⁶ Throughout the piece, Ahle writes for the instruments in a similar punctuating manner as he used in “Unser Herr” (No. 14, discussed above). The strings seem to repeat the text “Ich, ich hab’s gewagt,” but in the second part, the recorders seem to repeat “in Lieb und Leid,” which brings focus to the emotional context of the piece. By setting apart this half of the text, and specifically by using recorders, Ahle enables the listener to pay special attention on what one could see as the crux of the text: marriage is not about our actions, or our happiness, but God’s plan.

Ahle demonstrates throughout his collection that the instruments are used to serve the text. His choice of instruments considers the text, as does his treatment. In many cases, whether he intended or not, his instrumental writing seems to suggest a certain reading of the text – perhaps his reading, perhaps by chance. Either way, a deeper understanding of his use of instruments and more

⁶⁵ Hassler sets the text in the same way in his 1601 Lustgarten.

⁶⁶ “Was im Ehstand uns kömtzu hand, den lieb’n Gott lassen walten.”

detailed study of their parts uncovers a sort of logic to his choices, which is invaluable in performance.