



RHETORIC AND THE MOTET PASSION

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Some years ago a great German poet thought he had made the unique discovery that music is almost exactly the same in this regard as rhetoric. How amazing! Musical masters, especially those who want to and should instruct others in composition, should really be ashamed that they have been so negligent with these things: for though here and there one or another of them may have come upon salutary thoughts, purely from common sense: the good gentlemen have as yet remained only on the periphery and have not been able to penetrate the central point, much less bring the thing to its proper technical form, neither overtly nor covertly.

J. Mattheson Der Vollkommene Capellmeister
(1739): 2.9.2

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This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any University and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

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Helen K. Rusak

I N T R O D U C T I O N

In this thesis I will make a full investigation of musica poetica theory. This branch of musical thought, which had its genesis in the late 16th century and continued in the writings of 17th and 18th century theorists, drew comparisons between rhetoric and music. The first known use of the term musica poetica was in the treatise of Nicolas Listenius titled Rudimentia musica published at Wittenberg in 1533. He provided the following vague definition: "music which leaves something after the labour of performance"(3). Subsequent discussions of musica poetica make specific reference to rhetorical technique and draw an analogy between the art of rhetoric and musical composition by borrowing terminology and methodology from rhetoric.

Musica poetica theory had its main focus in Germany at the time of the Lutheran Reformation, but although the Germans were the most prolific in their writings on the relationship between music and rhetoric, there were significant discussions of the same topic in theoretical tracts from other areas of the Continent and in England. The main focus of this work will be upon musica poetica theory in Germany, although some reference will be made to other theorists. The thesis, in the first instance, attempts to determine why there was a greater proliferation of tracts of this nature in Germany at the time than in other European musical centres. I will examine how closely musical rhetoric draws for its sources on the authors of classical rhetoric. For this, it is necessary to outline the main concepts in classical rhetoric and make a comparison between these and musica poetica definitions. The purpose of this is to comprehend musica poetica in its context.

I will then attempt to define the main principles of musica poetica theory. An effort will be made to determine whether musical rhetoric, or musica poetica theory is a useful tool for analysis by analysing music of the period in terms of rhetoric. This is based on the premise that music theory is historically relevant to music of the period. The purpose of the analysis will be to demonstrate that a rhetorical approach to music provides certain insights into that music and an understanding which other forms of analysis may not provide. If this is the case, then such an analysis may be considered in discussing a broader range of music from the period of the Renaissance and the Baroque and may perhaps have relevance beyond this.

The thesis has been divided into two sections. Part I is a discussion of the musica poetica tracts. It opens with a discussion of the intellectual climate in Lutheran Germany and the main features of Luther's educational doctrines. The focus is on the Saxony region and in particular Wittenberg, the centre of Lutheran theology.

A discussion of the musica poetica tracts is preceded by a brief outline of the principles of classical rhetoric and discusses its seminal authors. The musica poetica tracts are compared with their sources to ascertain how closely the musical theorists relied upon the teachings of the classical authors. As a part of this comparison a glossary of terms is constructed which includes a listing of terms and definitions found in musica poetica tracts, set alongside their original rhetorical meaning.

Part II of the thesis provides an analysis of Lutheran motet passions focussing specifically upon representative examples of the genre. These have been chosen by the author for a number of reasons which will be outlined at the beginning of Part II. This section of the thesis also provides a historical perspective of the motet passion and includes illustrative musical examples.

A C K N O W L E D G E M E N T S

iv.

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