1982

Froberger's Toccatas: Stylistic Considerations and Modern Editions

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FROBERGER'S TOCCATAS

PART I

STYLISTIC CONSIDERATIONS AND MODERN EDITIONS

James W. Kosnik

The music of Johann Jakob Froberger is recognized by scholars and musicians to be of significant artistic achievement and historical interest. Yet, with the possible exception of the suites, few modern-day performances of his music are likely to be heard for several reasons: the music does not fulfill the requirement of easy and accessible listening; the music lacks a certain superficial brilliance; or the proper instruments are unavailable so that the music cannot be heard in its most authentic language. The most important reason, however, is our own lack of understanding of the correct performance style which prevents the beauty and meaning of his music from being conveyed.1 The following letter from Princess Sybilla, Froberger's patroness during his final years, to Constantin Huygens, an international diplomat and connoisseur, illustrates that Froberger himself felt that not even his contemporaries could unlock the secrets of his art:

His [Froberger's] noble compositions I [Sybilla] amtreasuring so much, that I cannot and do not want, as long as I live, to give them out of my hands, the more so as I have promised him so frequently upon his request, not to give anybody anything of them, or if I would ever give anybody something, it should be from the first two operas; the other things I was to keep with myself; I know, of course, that he has loved Herr Chevalier Huygens dearly, and that he would not have liked to refuse something, therefore I shall with pleasure copy something of his compositions and send to him—if I only knew which of his pieces he already possesses—but on this condition that they would not become known to the public; but on this condition that they would not become known to the public; but only to his people's hands.2

BIOGRAPHY

Details of Froberger's life are shrouded in darkness due to a lack of verifiable historical information.3 He was born, according to the baptismal record, on May 19, 1616, in Stuttgart, Germany, where he grew up in the socially and politically unstable climate of the Thirty Years War. He was appointed court organist to the Holy Roman Emperor in 1637, and later that same year he requested and received permission to travel to Italy to study with Frescobaldi. Froberger returned to Vienna in 1641, a period which marks the beginning of an international career as a keyboard virtuoso with frequent trips throughout Europe. The final years of his life were spent at the private estate of Princess Sybilla of Héricourt, near Montbéliard, in eastern France. He died at Héricourt in May of 1667, and is buried not far from Montbéliard.

STYLISTIC CONSIDERATIONS

Froberger's extant toccatas may be divided into two categories based on stylistic characteristics: toccatas in the elevation style; and sectional toccatas which result from the alternation of free and strict writing.

Froberger's close stylistic affinity with Italian keyboard music is particularly evident in the elevation toccatas, pieces which were used in the Catholic liturgy to create a mystical and ethereal mood for the consecration of the bread and wine. The roots of this type of toccata antedate the introverted madrigal and are found in the Italian adaptation of Spanish Renaissance lute music. The elevation toccatas are also related to early Neapolitan keyboard pieces written by Trabaci and Mayone in the durezze e ligature style, where chains of suspensions and dissonances create a highly chromatic texture. Finally, these pieces are also reminiscent of the harmonic and chromatic experimentation found in the early Baroque madrigal.

Froberger's elevation toccatas demonstrate his assimilation of certain aspects of Frescobaldi's style, particularly the written-out trill as an organizational motive.4

Example 1. Toccata VI, mm. 30-31.

Even though this figure is evident in most keyboard music of the period, it is an essential feature in Frescobaldi's elevation toccatas from the Fiori musicali, and in his two books of toccatas. The elevation toccatas exhibit Froberger's most expressive and personal writing: the sudden harmonic shifts and chromatic reflections produce a very dramatic effect. Analysis reveals an in-\n
Froberger's extant toccatas of Gabrieli and Merulo. The toccatas contain many compositional techniques: the trill motive as organizational device, a vocal-polyphonic style of choral writing; rapid passagework with abrupt terminations.

Example 3. Toccata XVIII, mm. 33-34.

These characteristics are particularly evident in the toccatas of Merulo and Frescobaldi, and Froberger is very much influenced by Frescobaldi's ability to create a coherent musical structure through a variety of contrasting musical figures. Froberger's unique contribution to the development of the toccata is signifi-

Example 2. Toccata VI, mm. 27-29.
The dramatic boldness of the free material is neatly balanced by the logical simplicity of the imitative writing, and in most cases a satisfying sense of architectural symmetry results from the alternation of contrasting material. The architectural ramifications are important, for they represent the precursors of the late toccatas and praeludia of the North German organists, as well as the early organ works of J.S. Bach.

Most scholars have accepted the concept that the "free" or nominative sections in the toccatas are the result of an improvisatory practice. Murray Bradshaw in his book, The Origins of the Toccata, however, states that Froberger's toccatas are the culmination of a different practice: the use of the "ideal cantus firmus" technique. The concept means that a segment of chant, usually a Gregorian psalm tone—often inaudible—provides a model for the structure of the free sections.

Example 4. Toccata XVIII, mm. 1-6.

Example 5. Psalm Tone V.

Bradshaw traces the relationship of early keyboard intonations and toccatas to the intabulated vocal falsobordone, and says that the falsobordone of Cabezón are the direct stylistic ancestors of the Venetian intonations and toccatas.

The application of the ideal cantus firmus theory to Froberger's toccatas is somewhat problematic because the original psalm-tone pitches are often neither audible nor present, and the extraction of a specific psalm tone appears at times to be somewhat arbitrary. This theory, nevertheless, is a provocative, even radical, departure from the traditional view which suggests that improvisation alone is the inspiration for these pieces.

Another important stylistic consideration is Froberger's application of the style brisé. While his treatment of the style brisé is almost often found in the suites, evidence of its use is apparent in both the sectional and elevation toccatas. The term describes the broken chord/arppeggio style of French lute playing. The broken chord style is characterized by rapidly alternating notes in different registers that supply, in turn, melody and harmony. Seemingly distributed in arbitrary fashion over the various registers, the notes produced in their composite rhythm a continuous strand of sound. The widespread popularity of the style brisé even penetrated the conservative realm of organ music.

Not only were numerous ornaments from French lute and clavecin music bodily transferred to the organ, but even the style brisé, the very opposite of true organ idiom. The transfer to the organ of a lute idiom demonstrates a spectacular fashion that whenever in Baroque music there was a contrast between the idiom of a style and that of an instrument, stylistic considerations prevailed.

While Froberger probably acquired an appreciation for the style brisé from French lutenists who were active in Germany, or from his own contacts with Chambronnières and Louis Couperin while in Paris, there is no supportive evidence for his adaptation of the style to the keyboard. David Fuller has even suggested that Louis Couperin's interest in transferring lute style to keyboard could have been inspired by Froberger. Although the Louis Couperin preludes cannot be dated, none could have been composed as early as 1652, when Froberger visited Paris. The following example illustrates Froberger's utilization of the broken chord style in an elevation toccata.

Example 6. Toccata VI, mm. 6-7.

The imitative segments in Froberger's sectional toccatas exhibit the Germanic predilection for counterpoint, and these sections are more logically organized than in corresponding Italian works. The monothematic treatment of an imitative figure and the application of the variation principle to unify the different imitative sections illustrate compositional features of the contemporary keyboard cantata. The imitative sections contain frequent simple repetitions of a motive, and a noticeable lack of episodic development. Even though the imitative writing in Froberger's sectional toccatas cannot be compared with the brilliance of a Bach fugue, these sections provide an excellent counterbalance to the rhapsodic and dramatic writing found in the free sections.

EDITIONS

Most of Froberger's extant keyboard music is preserved in three manuscripts of Viennese provenance which are dedicated to Ferdinand III and Leopold I, rulers of the Holy Roman Empire. The toccatas are beautifully copied and illustrate the use of Italian keyboard tablature: a six-line staff for the right hand and a seven-line or eight-line staff for the left hand. This type of notation represents the stilius phantasticus, a term used by Athanasius Kircher, an important mid-seventeenth-century scholar.

The stilius phantasticus, or improvisatory style: bizarre, quasi-uniformed, irregular in texture and daring in harmony, only conceivable on the keyboard, and really—conceived outside of the keyboard. The form of this style is the toccata. And, there being no voice-leading making score notation possible, its notation is the so-called Italian tablature...

The following list represents important twentieth-century editions of Froberger's music which contain toccatas:


Adler's edition of Froberger's complete works marks the revival of interest in Froberger's music at the beginning of the twentieth century. Seiffert's edition of ten pieces is reprinted by Kalmus; unfortunately, most of the toccatas are omitted from this edition. Walter's 1967 edition of selected works is reliable and is recommended for its visual clarity and accuracy of detail; however, many excellent toccatas are also not included. In both the Adler and Walter editions the music contains very few discrepancies in notes when compared with some of the original manuscripts, probably due to the high degree of legibility of the original sources. The main differences, however, are Walter's use of broken lines to indicate both measure lines and tied notes, and Adler's somewhat arbitrary use of accidentals.

Heugel, the French publishing firm, has recently released Volume I of a complete new edition of Froberger's music. Howard Schott, the editor of the new Froberger publication, states in the Preface that the preparation of the edition is based on a seven-line or eight-line staff, and that the editor has adhered closely to original sources. However, measure 41, Schott faithfully transcribes Froberger's indication of a 6:5 proportional shift in white notation; however, Adler transforms the $\frac{6}{5}$ into $\frac{12}{10}$ and employs modern rhythm conventions to accommodate the new adaptation. Schott's edition therefore provides a better appreciation for the proportional implications between these sections and the surrounding passages written in C time.

The following table collates four editions of Froberger's toccatas, and includes an indication of recommended toccatas. Leonhardt suggests that all 25 toccatas found in Adler's edition should not be considered authentic works for the following reasons: Toccata XXI is a duplication of Toccata XVI, and Toccatas XXII-XXV should be attributed to Pachelbel rather than Froberger on the basis of stylistic considerations.
FROBERGER’S TOCCATAS

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NOTES

1. This article is based on the author’s dissertation, *The Toccatas of Johann Jakob Froberger: A Study of Style and Organ Performance* (unpublished D.M.A. dissertation, Eastman School of Music, Universi-


6. Ibid., p. 22.


8. Ibid., p. 172.

9. Conversation with Professor David Fuller, July 9, 1981, Buffalo, N.Y.


12. This edition is available through Broude Brothers Limited.

13. Leonhardt suggests that the fourteenth Toccata of Santini’s edition the Vatican Codex with Frescobaldi’s works should be attributed to Froberger. Leonhardt, “Froberger,” p. 28.

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