

# Art history essay example



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

## **Biography essay example**

Considering the style of J. S. Bach compositions from the perspective of musical history, it should be firstly mentioned that the majority of specialists tend to define his style from the perspective of two different approaches. The first is directly based on the use of heroic mode and defines Bach as a genius composer and performer. According to those publications, the works of Bach were infused with blessed musical harmony giving bright colors to everything depicted in his compositions. At the same time, the second approach towards defining and analyzing his style completely contradicts the first, which is mostly based on the philosophy of metaphysics. Instead, being more advanced and more common today, the second approach has very strong relations with the principle of language of chemistry. In other words, from the perspective of contemporary musicology, the style of Bach is more adequately to deconstruct into its elements and properties further followed by adequate and exact analysis, which is commonly used for chemical researches (Dreyfus, 1987, p. 56).

In simpler words, the first approach is generally being criticized for it to be too metaphorical despite the fact that it adequately explains that Bach's music style departed from the contemporary sounds and structures; moreover, the researchers following that approach tend to state that Bach directly confronted the styles of Brahms and Beethoven. At the same time, the second approach tends to highlight and emphasize the common features and similarities between Bach and his contemporaries. Therefore, the researchers following this approach tend to define the signature elements of Bach's style including Lutheran theology, style galant, ritornello form, French

style etc. as already being present in his musical environment and realized by his contemporaries.

In other words, the researchers tend to state that Bach was significantly influenced by corresponding religious beliefs, chorale tradition, works of Vivaldi etc. At the same, such approach ignores the fact that Bach did not only use the common stylistic features of the music, but he also reinterpreted and adjusted them according to his own style (Dreyfus, 1987, p. 56).

Therefore, it appears to be more than desirable to figure out the exact stage of development of music interpretation's traditional mode along with capturing exact historical period of time providing sufficient context to that stage. In other words, the individual works of Bach will be considered and analyzed from the perspective of historically actual system of beliefs and standards. Consequently, the analysis of composer's style will be based on the actual coherence of his works towards expectations imposed by musical environment, while also providing adequate and dynamic response to it.

For example, among the famous compositions and works by Bach, the sonata for viola da gamba and harpsichord in G minor (BWV 1029) represents significant interest from the perspective of the aforementioned analytical approach. It has been widely discussed by composers, musical historians and analysts widely and the outcomes of their studies were mostly contradicting one another. Therefore, such work represents one of the most effective indicators for shaping the musical style of Bach (Dreyfus, 1987, p. 61).

In particular, different analysts have been following different interpretive strategies when decomposing and interpreting the BWV 1029's 1st movement. For example, the work of Spitta (1873) clearly admires this composition of Bach, while also highlighting its originality and beauty. According to him, this originality stems from the fact that the piece begins similarly to sonata form, while its thematic content has numerous similarities with concerto. He states that " here we have a composition in Magyar style... sometimes [its details] unite in the main subject in heavy unison-an effect seldom found in this master-beneath its tread the very earth groans" (Spitta, 1873, p. 726). It should be therefore concluded that Spitta's annotation excessively uses fancy imagery; however, it should still be accepted that it clearly reflects that the traditional sonata form of the piece becomes reshaped and redesigned above its traditional stylistic borders.

At the same time, more contemporary writers tend to follow more critical and objective approach towards analyzing the same piece of Bach's work. In particular, they tend to highlight the fact that the used sonata form is ambiguous. Moreover, by accepting the musical genius of Bach, they also focus on the core of this genius. As a result, the contemporary writers tend to explain the aforementioned contradicting and paradoxical association between sonata and concerto forms by reporting that the sonata movement continuously returns in expectable keys while also being similar to ritornello. Consequently, they tend to report that such movement is rather expected to be followed by concerto-type structures (Williams, 2003).

Another example can easily be found in Bach's use of after-beats in his respective works being inspired by the French upbeat Baroque tradition.

However, Bach's interpretation of these upbeats is mostly contradicting the styles of his contemporaries. For example, in his Fugue in C minor (BWV 575) the first bars start with short rest. In other words, the first major beat of the piece is left empty. What is more important, such use of rests is considerably different from the French long upbeats despite the fact that the French tradition also accepts the use of somewhat incomplete bars. However, the example of BWV 575 demonstrates that such use of rests does not simply prepare the composition for the next bars and melodies. Instead, it represents its own rhythmic and metric pattern. In fact, such bars starting with rest will not be simply capable of realizing the function of preparing the piece for further movements. In fact, the chosen example demonstrates how such rest leads and emphasizes the rest at the end of the bar (Abravaya, 2004, p. 19).

The similarities and differences between compositions using downbeats and upbeats can be illustrated by comparing Bach's Sinfonia in E-flat major and Couperin's L'Atendrissante. The latter represents a slow-paced sarabande and is being structured clearly based on four-bar phrases that are shaped symmetrically. Having looked closer on Bach's work, it appears rather clear that the rhythmic structure of his Sinfonia is similar; however, there are differences that make it sound differently. In particular, it is the use of basso ostinato along with after-beat before playing the upper voices. This stylistic approach results in the structural shift of all the endings of phrases for one bar, while the actual phrase lasting four bars is being continuously maintained (Abravaya, 2004, p. 22).

Correspondingly, Bach's music in these examples represents a unique combination of musical tradition of his contemporaries, while also including various types of upbeats and musical elements that have not been widely used before him. Still, it should be concluded that such features clearly represented the tradition of Baroque music style including both German after-beat and French fore-beat. However, it should also be remembered that both these types of upbeats have become obsolete and rarely used by further generations of composers due to the simple fact that the following age of Classicism followed the principle of "natural simplicity" in music.

It should still be accepted that the Bach's unique approach to using common features and characteristics of his contemporary environment has eventually made his sound and his style so unique and somehow contradicting his contemporaries.

Nonetheless, it should still be concluded that both the aforementioned approaches towards defining the style of Bach are rather not adequate and valid due to the aforementioned examples. In particular, instead of classifying Bach as the timeless composer, it is worth considering his music from more analytical and scholarly perspective. Moreover, simply stating that Bach followed his contemporaries in his music would be not true due to the fact that aforementioned musical examples clearly illustrate that. On the other hand, it would also be not valid to consider Bach as a new embodiment of his contemporaries from historical perspective.

In particular, such approach does not directly explain why and how Bach managed to compose and perform such music in the early 18th century.

Moreover, even having defined and discussed the historical and social foundation for his works, it would also be inadequate to state that only these factors shaped the style of Bach. In other words, it should be concluded that style of Bach was significantly inspired by the sounds and structures of his contemporaries; however, his adaptation of these commonly used features made them uncommon and even contradicting the styles of his contemporaries.

## References

Abravaya, I. (2004). The Baroque Upbeat: Outline of its Typology and Evolution. In *Bach Studies from Dublin: Irish Musical Studies Vol 8* (pp. 17-28). Senate House Library.

Dreyfus, L. (1987). J. S. Bach and the Status of Genre: Problems of Style in the G-Minor Sonata BWV 1029. *The Journal Of Musicology*, 5(1), 55-78.  
[http://dx. doi. org/10. 2307/763824](http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/763824)

Spitta, P. (1873). *Johann Sebastian Bach* (pp. 726-727). Leipzig: Breitkopf und Hartel.

Williams, P. (2003). *The organ music of J. S. Bach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.