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# Inventing a Melody with Harmony

## *Tonal Potential and Bach's "Das alte Jahr vergangen ist"*

Marianne Kielian-Gilbert

**Abstract** Intensely chromatic and tonally open, Bach's chorale prelude "Das alte Jahr vergangen ist," BWV 614, suggests different contexts of reception "as-music-analysis." I imagine a reception of the prelude as liturgical-musical contemplation and religious experience. I construe Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel's setting of Bach's "Das alte Jahr" in the concluding "Nachspiel" of her piano song cycle, *Das Jahr*, as suggesting interactions of public and private sonic worlds. I follow potential tonal-harmonic alternatives (after Schoenberg and Berg on the chorale) and implications of staging a motivic parsing through timbre and articulation (after Webern). These differently related interpretive and perceptual contexts shape experience and invoke orientations by which the music-structural aspects of a work can be construed and experienced. Bringing two or more contexts together stimulates new levels and types of connection, just as a melodic pattern continually recalibrates and interacts with potential harmonic and contrapuntal orientations. Changing or shifting emphases in one orientation respond to the demands or constraints of another; in particular, I track the tonal potential of interactions of prolongational, associative, or stretto-like musical figurations in the prelude. These "differences" in orientation become creative and expressive of newly available content, multiplying interactions of composition and text, reception and analysis.

One does not harmonize, one invents with harmony.  
—Schoenberg

<i>Das alte Jahr vergangen ist,</i>	1.2. The old year now hath passed away,
<i>wir danken dir, Herr Jesu Christ,</i>	3. We thank thee, O our God today,
<i>dass du uns in so grosser G'fahr</i>	4. That Thou has kept us through the year,
<i>so gnädiglich behüt dies Jahr.</i>	5.6. When danger and distress were near.

I. BELLS TOLL.<sup>1</sup> The chiming activates thoughts and memories of the year that has passed and of those who have gone. In this resonance, impulses of beginning and renewal oscillate with those of ending and closure. Fading and resur-

My thanks to Halina Goldberg, Daniel Melamed, and Severine Neff for their comments on an earlier version of this essay.

<sup>1</sup> The following experiential descriptions and "modes of listening" engage imaginary reconstructions, i.e., my imagining of an experience of Bach's "Das alte Jahr vergangen ist," BWV 614, in a liturgical setting might differ from that of someone who is Lutheran, or steeped in eighteenth-

century German history. The "bells" I have in mind are a music-sound "image" of a certain rate, quality, and resonance of harmonic progression. In eighteenth-century Germany, bells were rung on almost all feasts, not tolled (which is a rhythm associated with remembrance and loss).



Example 1. "Das alte Jahr vergangen ist," BWV 614. Facsimile (Bach 1981, 19)

facing in memory, the yearly cycle continues, unfulfilled, and full of hope. Thanksgiving and prayer prevail over grief and despair.

Two manuals and pedal (see Example 1). Manual 1 sounds an ornamented chorale melody; chorale phrases 1 and 2 unfold the tune with silent text on the old year's passing as chromatic lines in manual 2 and pedal ascend and descend, traversing scale degrees  $\hat{5}$  to  $\hat{1}$ , and exchange these trajectories in invertible counterpoint. Phrase 3 offers thanks to God; phrases 4 through 6 (a repetition of 5) are mindful of the ever-present nearness of danger and distress and of the refuge and safety that have ensued from divine grace.

Twelve measures of emotional intensity and the continual striving of intense chromaticism counterbalance an elaborated melody in dolce cornet (or a soft mixture with a small diapason or flute) distinct against a proportional sonic background.<sup>2</sup> Contemplation joins listening. The occasion of worship and the elaboration of the chorale tune invite reflection on the silent

<sup>2</sup> These registration suggestions for the playing of BWV 614 are found in more recent editions (e.g., Bach 1933); a subdued registration is by no means required.

chorale text and participation in the congregational singing to come.<sup>3</sup> The communal sense of intersubjectivity in this imagined context moves the listener's subjectivity.

Each harmonic-textual "tolling"—"Das alte Jahr," "A–G–E"—expresses the potential for movement or stasis, ascending, descending, and sustaining; lines alternate in the ascent of beginning, promise, and life, or in the descent of closure, passing, and death, and continue in oscillating movements of potential and unfulfilled desire. Emergent through the nesting of harmonic patterns is the coloratura voice, elaborating and varying in diminution and cadenza.<sup>4</sup> "Das alte Jahr vergangen ist"—*Orgelbüchlein*, BWV 614, J. S. Bach, *Chorale Prelude for the New Year*.

\* \* \*

II. Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel composed her piano song cycle *Das Jahr* in the fall of 1841, shaping twelve pieces named after the months of the year. She concluded the cycle with a short postlude, "Nachspiel," shown in Example 2, that sets J. S. Bach's "Das alte Jahr vergangen ist." Her musical depiction of months of the year was an outgrowth of her experiences on an extended journey to Italy in the autumn of 1839 with her husband, painter Wilhelm Hensel, and their nine-year-old son, Sebastian.

In the "Nachspiel" a short dramatic segment drawn from the melody of the opening of Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*, shown in Example 3, alternates with each of the five different melodic phrases of Bach's chorale.<sup>5</sup> In Mendelssohn Hensel's setting, the "Das alte Jahr" chorale tune receives an intimate, texturally close, and reflective rendering, perhaps suggesting private devotion despite the public collective context of Lutheran congregational singing, and in stark contrast to the loudness and metric assertions of the recurring segment that evokes the opening of Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*.<sup>6</sup>

The descending chromatic bass of mm. 1–2 departs strikingly from the pedal point of the opening of the *Passion*: Mendelssohn Hensel's musical setting suggests a conception that reframes and repositions the chromatic linear

<sup>3</sup> We do not know how or whether Bach used these chorale preludes for liturgical preluding, though they were meant to teach that technique; see his preface to the *Orgelbüchlein* collection. This hymn may have been specified in Leipzig as one of several possible tunes for the end of the service.

<sup>4</sup> *Coloratura* refers to a set of practices of ornamentation and diminution (the little notes that "rush" to the next long note, as Bernhard writes), not to changing the tone color of the voice. See *Grove Music Online*, s.v. "Coloratura" (by Owen Jander and Ellen T. Harris), <http://www.grovemusic.com/> (accessed April 7, 2007). Three of the *Orgelbüchlein* chorale preludes feature the hymn melody as highly elaborated in the upper line (soprano): "Das alte Jahr," "O Mensch beweine dein Sünde gross," and "Wenn wir in Höchsten Nöthen sein." See also Stinson 2001.

<sup>5</sup> In a private farewell concert for Fanny, prior to leaving on an English tour, Felix "improvised variations on the first chorus of the *St. Matthew Passion* on the organ of a Berlin church," an experience she later described as "electrifying" and "unforgettable" (Toews 1993, 738). In setting the chorale tune, Fanny preserved the notes of the melody; the exception, the C natural replacing C# in the chorale melody of m. 6, maintained the melody in the tonal frame of A minor.

<sup>6</sup> Notably, the "Das alte Jahr" chorale and *Orgelbüchlein* prelude, BWV 614, were favorites of both Felix Mendelssohn, an "organist of first order" (Gounod), and Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel. See Stinson 2006, 52–53. After his revival of Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* in 1829, Felix also conducted the passion in Leipzig in 1841 in Bach's own church.

Choral

Notengraphik: prima nota, 3549 Twistetal

Example 2. "Nachspiel" (chorale). From Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel, *Das Jahr* (1841)

Coro I. II.

Flauto traverso I,  
Oboe I.

Flauto traverso II,  
Oboe II.

Violino I.

Violino II.

Viola.

Organo e  
Continuo.

Figured bass notation for Continuo:

First system: 8 4 2, 7 4 2, 7 4 2, 6 4 2, 5 4 2

Second system: 6 5, 6 4, 7 4, 8 3, 8 4, 7 4, 7 4, 6 5, 6 4, 7 4

Example 3. J. S. Bach, *St. Matthew Passion*, mm. 1–5

figuration of “Das alte Jahr,” BWV 614. She works in the expanding chromatic components of the passion segment in dramatic contrast to the hushed and primarily diatonic setting of the “Das alte Jahr” chorale melody in A minor.<sup>7</sup> These two gestures continue throughout the piece in a ritornello-solo alternation: a *St. Matthew Passion* segment (with its aspects of Bach’s chorale-prelude setting of BWV 614) is followed by a chorale setting of the “Das alte Jahr” melody. In the last phrase of the “Das alte Jahr” chorale (mm. 15–16), features of the chorale melody begin to assimilate the dramatic and chromatic linear character of the passion segment prior to the *forte* arrival of the A pedal of mm. 17–21. Following the E<sub>5</sub> of m. 19, the goal of the chromatic ascent from  $\hat{1}$  to  $\hat{5}$  (A–B–C#–D#–E) above the concluding pedal, a reference to the “Das alte Jahr” melody sounds in diminution: is it an A-major tonic in triumphal reworking of Bach and/or the plagal reminiscence of the chorale fragment in the context of A major as colored by D minor?

\* \* \*

III. Before asserting the striking claim in his *Theory of Harmony*—that there are “no nonharmonic tones”—Arnold Schoenberg ([1911] 1983) offered a detailed chapter on chorale harmonization, discussing alternate possibilities and the tonal-harmonic potential of J. S. Bach’s chorale setting of another chorale, “In dich hab ich gehoffet, Herr,” from the *St. Matthew Passion*, as stripped of Bach’s nonharmonic tones. Schoenberg’s exercise for the student was to cultivate the sensibility to “invent a melody whole with harmony” ([1911] 1983, 287):

Bach was not merely hanging ornaments onto an otherwise deficient or uninteresting harmony to give it luster. Just take out each individual voice and look at it by itself. You will find that they are nothing less than melodies, which are often just as beautiful as the chorale melody itself. And this is an aim entirely different from that of external [adornment]! (343)

The practice actualizes the tonal-harmonic potential of a melody as an integral aspect of the music. In this sensibility, melody and harmony emerge from and give rise to each other. “Adornment” becomes structural and integral through the continued “juxtaposition” and connection of elements despite limited generative and developmental processes.<sup>8</sup> Harmony becomes thematic

<sup>7</sup> I have not compared other hymnals to see if Mendelssohn Hensel might have borrowed this harmonization (see, e.g., the similarity of her setting of chorale phrases 1 and 2 to phrase 4 [second line] of the chorale in the Weissenfels hymnal shown in Example 7[a]). What I believe striking is the apparent reference to the chromatic motive of Bach’s organ setting of “Das alte Jahr,” BWV 614, in her harmonization of the opening segment of “*Nachspiel*.”

<sup>8</sup> As discussed in Schoenberg’s chapter on harmonization, the limitations for development (harmonic and motivic) are

due in part to the separation of short phrases by fermatas and conventional cadence formulae: “The chorale is articulated by a pause at the end of each musical phrase coinciding with the end of each line of the text; these pauses divide the thought up into parts. The individual parts in such simple art forms relate to one another by the simplest forms of contrast or complement. Such mosaic-like assemblage of parts permits no very complicated relationships and favors, as its unifying element, the principle of [sic] more or less simple repetition” (Schoenberg [1911] 1983, 289).

and motivic through its dialogic relationship with melody and polyphonic texture.<sup>9</sup> Though distinct, the functional aspects of harmony and the referential aspects of melody thus actualize as constantly interactive.

These exercises in studying the tonal-harmonic potentials of Bach's chorale harmonizations call attention to the possibility of understanding melody and harmonization in one-to-many potentials of realization. As such, the multiplication of potentials—in the combination of melody, harmony, and counterpoint—differs from, say, the practice of harmonic reduction to chords and non-chord tones. It is not simply that hearing a chorale prelude involves attending to multiple layers of reference to a hymn melody and text; it may be problematic to assume that an elaborated chorale setting refers directly and only to one particular harmonization of a chorale tune or stanza of a strophic poem. In turn, the chorale tune itself may also generate one-to-many references or hearings in relation to a set of different melodic realizations, not localized to, or determinable by, a single source.

This activation of one-to-many potentials for hearing from tune to harmonization and from harmonization to tune also has deep implications for temporal experience in reception and analysis more generally. For example, Berg's analysis "in chorale style" of mm. 1–10 of the first movement of Schoenberg's String Quartet no. 1 in D minor "slows" down the temporal experience of the passage by lengthening and aligning its polyphony of harmonic-tonal-contrapuntal unfolding in the "style" of a four-part chorale. (See the correspondence of measure numbers of Berg's chorale in Example 4 to Schoenberg's music in Example 5.)<sup>10</sup> To the extent that different orientations (melodic, left-to-right; and harmonic, back-to-front) are in temporal play or interaction, this kind of hearing differs from that of a harmonic reduction of a particular musical work that presents the vertical configurations (say, of an orchestral score) ordered "out of time" as a simple succession of chords. Concerns of temporal play are pertinent to construing interactions of prolongational, associative, and overlapping tonal potentials (e.g., in Bach's BWV 614).

Giving particular attention to the "melody" of the bass line, Berg invokes Schoenberg's maxim, "Every thematic idea is invented together with all its counterpoints" (Berg [1924] 1965, 194). Berg's "chorale" phrases (mm. 1–8, 8–16; 17–18, 19–20; and 21–22, 23–24, 25–[28]) correspond to and overlap slightly with the "melody" of Schoenberg's bass line in the cello. "In an excess unheard-of since Bach" (199), this "hearing" includes:

keeping track of all the voices that are so pregnant in their different characters, and of recognizing as such the beginnings and endings (which are all at different points) of these parts of melodies of different lengths, and of dwelling (with

<sup>9</sup> For further implications of these ideas, also see Hahn 2004.

<sup>10</sup> See Berg [1924] 1965, especially 190 and 197. An explanation of tonal potential in prolongational, associational, and overlapping orientations appears in the next section of this essay.



The image displays a musical score for Schoenberg's String Quartet no. 1, measures 1 through 10. The score is written for four voices (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) and piano accompaniment. The key signature is D minor (three flats) and the time signature is 1/1. The score is divided into three systems. The first system contains measures 1-4, the second system contains measures 5-7, and the third system contains measures 8-10. Berg's analysis is indicated by numbers 1-10 and asterisks (\*) above the notes, showing whole-tone chords. The score is written for four voices (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) and piano accompaniment.

**Example 4.** Berg's chorale analysis of Schoenberg, *String Quartet no. 1* in D minor, I, mm. 1–10. My numbers indicate measures of Schoenberg's quartet and his asterisks show whole-tone chords. Example adapted from Berg [1924] 1965, 197

understanding) on their sounding together. . . . [T]he harmonic richness of this music [is] nothing other than the result of a polyphony that is . . . the result of a juxtaposition of voices, distinguished by a hitherto unheard-of mobility in the melodic line. . . . Every smallest turn of phrase, even accompanimental figuration is significant for the melodic development of the four voices and their constantly changing rhythm—is, to put it in one word, thematic. (Berg on Schoenberg, in Berg [1924] 1965, 195, 196–97, 200)

Relatedly, “awaking what still sleeps here in the seclusion of Bach’s own abstract presentation” (Kolneder 1968, 170–71), the opening of Anton Webern’s orchestration (1934–35) of the “Ricercare a 6 voci” from Bach’s *Musical Offering* (1747), shown in Example 6, highlights a motivic reading in contrasting timbres of five notes (trombone), four notes (horn and trumpet), one note extended (horn and harp), four notes (trombone), and five notes (horn, trumpet, and harp) of Bach’s theme, as shown in Figure 1.<sup>11</sup> “So the

<sup>11</sup> Harrison Birtwistle has set J. S. Bach’s “Das alte Jahr vergangen ist” in *Five Chorale Preludes* (London, 1984), orchestrating each “line”—for voice, clarinet in A, basset horn in F, and bass clarinet in B♭.

Nicht zu rasch.

I. Violine *mf*

II. Violine

Viola *mp*

Cello *mf*

Berg chorale: 1 *p* 2 3 4 5

Berg: 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 *mp*

Berg: 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 *f*

Berg: 22 23 24 25 26 27 (28) *ff*

**Example 5. Schoenberg, String Quartet no. 1 in D minor, I, mm. 1–10. My numbers refer to the measures of Berg’s analysis in the “style” of a four-part chorale. Example adapted from Berg [1924] 1965, 190**

The image shows a page from a musical score for an orchestral setting. The score is written for a variety of instruments, including Flute (Fl.), Oboe (Ob.), Clarinet in B-flat (Clar. B $\flat$ ), Horn in F (Hr. F), Trumpet in C (Trp. C), Trombone (Trb.), Harp, Violin II (2. Vi.), Viola (Vla. (solo)), and Cello/Double Bass (Cello/Bass). The key signature is three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat) and the time signature is common time (C). The score includes dynamic markings such as *pp* (pianissimo), *p* (piano), and *con sord.* (con sordina). There are also tempo markings: *poco allarg.* (poco allargando) and *tempo*. The notation includes various musical symbols like notes, rests, and slurs.

Example 6. Webern’s orchestral setting (1934–35) of J. S. Bach, “Ricercare,” from *The Musical Offering* (1747). From Kolneder 1968, 168, example 120

Trombone	Horn	Trp.	Hn/Hp	Horn/Trb.	Horn	Trp/Harp	Vi
5 notes	4 notes	1 note	4 notes	5 notes			
C4-E $\flat$ 4-G4-A $\flat$ 4-B3	G4-F $\sharp$ 4	F4-E4	E $\flat$ 4–	D4-D $\flat$ 4-C4-B3	G3-C4-F4	E $\flat$ 4-D4	(C)

Figure 1. Webern, timbral “analysis” of Bach’s *Musical Offering*

form seems to me: five notes, then 4 + 1 and 1 + 4 which is twice five, and finally five notes again! . . . isn't it worthwhile awaking what still sleeps here in the seclusion of Bach's own abstract presentation[?]" (Kolneder 1968, 170–71). Here, these motivic/melodic patterns "sleep" against or with patterns of possible harmonic groups.

If music speaks to us, it is also because music speaks through us. These characterizations of Bach's setting of "Das alte Jahr vergangen ist," BWV 614, suggest different contexts of reception "as-music-analysis"—for example, through liturgical and musical contemplation, intertextual interaction (Mendelssohn Hensel), grasping the implications of potential tonal-harmonic alternatives (Schoenberg and Berg), or staging a motivic parsing through timbre and articulation (Webern). The potentials of music in differently related interpretive and/or perceptual contexts shape experience and call up orientations by which the music-structural aspects of a work can be construed. Bringing two or more different contexts together stimulates new levels and types of connection, just as a melodic pattern continually recalibrates and interacts with potential harmonic orientations (and vice versa). Changing or shifting emphases in one orientation may respond to the demands or constraints of another. The "differences" thus construed become temporally creative and expressive of newly available content, multiplying and joining musical expressivity and substance.

These examples have proposed aural images suggestive of (layered residues of) modes of reception, listening, and understanding: my imaginary reconstruction (experience) of Bach's "Das alte Jahr vergangen ist," BWV 614, in a liturgical setting, or in interaction with Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel's "Nachspiel" with its orchestrations of public and private sonic worlds at the conclusion of her piano song cycle, *Das Jahr*, or interacting with twentieth-century "analyses" of Bach by Viennese composers Schoenberg and Webern, or of Schoenberg by Berg in "chorale style." The range of experiential and historical contexts may multiply in "contemporary" hearings/analyses of BWV 614 even today. Music experience extends from and shapes who one is, the language(s) one speaks, and the knowledge and tools brought to that experience. Though particular sound images may not be historically specific for 1713 or 1841, it is no longer possible to read or understand music reception and intertextual interaction solely in one direction, for example, from earlier to later historical or present-day situations.<sup>12</sup> Particularly suggestive are the ways that one orientation can resonate with or sharpen another, or the ways that particular descriptions align with accounts of conceptual/experiential responses to music-structural aspects (and vice versa).

<sup>12</sup> Michael Klein (2005) makes a similar point in his study of intertextuality in western art music. See Finscher (1998) for a discussion of related issues in composers' reception of Bach and his music. Differences in sound and in association of "bell sounds" in Bach's music are as suggestive

for analysis as for their symbolism. See, for example, the alto recitative from Cantata BWV 198 (Trauer Ode), "Der Glockenbebendes Geton." Thanks to Tamara Balter for this musical reference.

1. 1) 1. = 2. 1)

2. = 3. 2) 3. = 4.

4. = 5. 4. = 6. 3)

1) Bach melody

2) Bach melody

3) Original bass

Example 7(a). “Das alte Jahr vergangen ist,” chorale. From *Weissenfels Gesang- und Kirchen-Buch* in Bach 1984, 62

The following discussion develops some of these ideas on interactive “interpretive” contexts in relation to experiencing tonal potential in Bach’s setting of the *Orgelbüchlein* prelude, BWV 614, demonstrating, as he claimed on the title page for music composition, how to “set a chorale ‘in all kinds of ways’” (Stinson 1996, 24, 31). Facets of tonal potential (prolongational, associative, or stretto-like interactions) emerge when responding to text and supplying music for worship, harmonizing the chorale tune, writing counterpoint (dealing with obbligato parts, especially the obbligato pedal),<sup>13</sup> compos-

13 “By ‘obbligato’ pedal, Bach means that in every one of the *Orgelbüchlein* chorales at least one voice *must* be taken throughout by the feet” (Stinson 1996, 33).

1. Das al - te Jahr ver - gan - gen ist; 2. wir

dan - ken dir, Herr Je - sus Christ, 3. daß du - uns in so

gro - ßer Gfah' 4. so gnä - dig - lich be - hüt' dies Jahr.

**Example 7(b).** “Das alte Jahr vergangen ist,” chorale, Johann Steuerlein, 1588. Brackets = “Das alte Jahr” motive; dotted brackets = filled-in motive. Numbers added = lines of the text.

ing, varying, and improvising with a motive,<sup>14</sup> or developing organ playing. Tonal potential embodies the interactions of motive/melody, harmony, and counterpoint in particular orientations of composition (and text), reception, and analysis.

### “Das alte Jahr vergangen ist,” BWV 614

The chorale prelude “Das alte Jahr vergangen ist” in the *Orgelbüchlein* dates from the early part of a “middle phase” of Bach’s chorale prelude composition from 1712–13, likely prior to his appointment as *Konzertmeister* in Weimar in 1714, an appointment that necessitated composing church cantatas while having correspondingly less time to compose organ music (Stinson 1996, 14).<sup>15</sup> Bach did not draw these chorales from a single hymnal source; one hymnal containing most of the *Orgelbüchlein* chorales was the *Weissenfels Gesang- und Kirchen-Buch* of 1714 (Bach 1984, 7). Example 7(a) shows a six-line setting of “Das alte Jahr” from this hymnal and represents the chorale in a form probably known to Bach, namely, with melody and figured bass.<sup>16</sup> Example 7(b)

<sup>14</sup> Thanks to Daniel Melamed for highlighting the connection of the thorough working out of an accompanimental motive or texture to the process of improvising a chorale prelude that a good player might be capable of doing. Also see Georg Andreas Sorge’s claim, “Nothing is more important to the organist than that he be adroit in prelude to the various chorales, according to their particular content, so that the congregation will be stimulated to sing the subsequent chorale with appropriate devotion. The Preludes . . . by Herr Capellmeister Bach in Leipzig are examples of this kind of keyboard piece that deserve the great renown they enjoy” (quoted in Wolff 1999, vii).

<sup>15</sup> Löhlein, editor of the facsimile edition (Bach 1981, 18), dates BWV 614 in the first group of the *de tempore* chorales during 1713–14.

<sup>16</sup> The Clark and Peterson edition (Bach 1984) transposed the tunes to pitch levels of the *Orgelbüchlein* settings; the small notes in the example give the figured-bass realization.

1. Das al - te Jahr ver - gan - gen ist, das al - te Jahr ver - gan - gen ist, wir  
 1. The old year now hath passed a - way; The old year now hath passed a - way; We

dan - ken dir, Herr. Je - su Christ, dass du uns in so gro - sser G'fahr so  
 thank Thee, O our God to - day, That Thou hast kept us through the year, When

gnä - dig - lich, be - hüt dies Jahr, so gnä - dig - lich be - hüt dies Jahr.  
 dan - ger and, dis - tress were near, When dan - ger and dis - tress were near.

**Example 7(c).** “Das alte Jahr vergangen ist,” J. S. Bach chorale setting, no. 162, BWV 288 (Bach 1933, 44). Brackets = “Das alte Jahr” motive; dotted brackets = filled-in motive; circles = patterns in chorale melody that reference phrase 3–4 in Example 7(a)

features an older, four-line version of the tune; the first and last lines of this text are repeated to create the six-line version of 7(a).<sup>17</sup>

The annotations of the tune in Examples 7(b) and (c) point out a recurring three-note descending melodic pattern, the “Das alte Jahr” motive—a falling whole-step and minor third bounded by a descending perfect fourth with potential scale degrees  $\hat{5}-\hat{4}-\hat{2}$  that sounds the initial text fragment “Das alte Jahr.” (This is the slow-tolling bell of my aural imaging.) This pattern occurs seven times in the four-line tune of Example 7(b) and six times in the

<sup>17</sup> This tune features six verses of German text in the *Evangelisches Kirchen-Gesangbuch* (Evangelische Verlagsanstalt 1976, no. 38). The annotations in Example 7(b) show that the occurrences of the motive do not align with the textual layout.

According to Emery (1941, 59), Steuerlein’s melody first appeared in 1588, set to a four-lined hymn, N. Herman’s “Gott Vater, der du deine Sonn,” and the tune was set to “Das alte Jahr vergangen ist” in 1608. “It is at least equally likely that when Bach went to Weimar he found already

established there a form of the melody indirectly derived from Vopelius—partly different, but resembling Vopelius’s in having six lines; this form familiar to him through his having to play it in the church services, he would naturally set” (Emery 1941, 59). Vopelius published *Neu Leipziger Gesangbuch* (Leipzig, 1682), a standard hymnal and one of two used in Bach’s Leipzig. See *Grove Music Online*, s.v. “Vopelius, Gottfried” (by Percy M. Young), <http://www.grovemusic.com/> (accessed April 7, 2007).

six-line tune at 7(a); dotted lines show occurrences that are filled in by step (A–G–F–E). The apparent high degree of melodic redundancy becomes a compositional problem.

Bach's setting of the tune in chorale No. 162, shown in Example 7(c), is one basis of the *Orgelbüchlein* chorale prelude, BWV 614.<sup>18</sup> It is a six-line setting, like the version in Example 7(a). Bach's setting restates the melody of the first line, but changes the harmonization in mm. 3–4. In addition, when the last line of the text repeats, Bach changes the melody and harmonization. Notably in both, the same melodic pattern begins mm. 7 and 11, perhaps drawn from the initial pattern of line 4 of the four-line chorale, or from phrase 3 of the six-line setting, as the encircled patterns in phrases 4 and 6 of Example 7(c) suggest. This repeated pattern creates a musical link that applies (associates) the danger (vs. divine protection) referenced in chorale phrase 4 to the final mention of divine protection (vs. danger and distress) in phrase 6.<sup>19</sup> Bach sets this melodic repetition differently in the final line: the close of the chorale shifts to the sharp side, thus preparing the return of the text and music of verse 2 (i.e., E major also articulates a dominant relation to A major, the dominant of D minor that begins the chorale).

*Tonal Potential:* back-to-front determinacy (prolongational parallelism), left-to-right presentation (translational parallelism), and overlapping presentation (translational combination, e.g., "stretto")

Consider different, though related, ways of construing the tonal-harmonic-melodic-contrapuntal setting of the chorale prelude "Das alte Jahr vergangen ist" as shown in Examples 8 and 9. These orientations capture the temporal play between a back-to-front (vertical) harmonic-tonal and melodic determinacy (prolongational parallelism, in Example 8); a left-to-right (horizontal) melodic and harmonic-tonal successive presentation (translational parallelism, in Example 9), and overlapping presentations (translational combination, e.g., "stretto," shown in Examples 8, 9, and 10).<sup>20</sup> The notion of parallelism refers to a restatement of a harmonic-melodic pattern in different temporal contexts whether embedded, successive, or overlapping. In experiencing tonal music, these types of temporal repetition pertain to experiences of tonal relationship as embedded, recursive (generative), and vertically rep-

<sup>18</sup> There is an additional harmonization of the chorale, no. 313, which begins in E minor (Bach 1941). Though the chronology is not known, both settings, nos. 162 and 313, provide a basis for the Cantional-style harmonization that underpins the organ setting. For the purpose of discussion, and because the setting begins in D minor, I have chosen to consider no. 162.

<sup>19</sup> This description refers to both the German and English translations. The German version reverses the clauses of the sentence, and the word order differs as well: Phrase

4: "dass du uns in so grosser G'fahr" (that you us in such great danger); Phrase 5: "so gnädiglich behüt dies Jahr" (so mercifully guarded this year).

<sup>20</sup> For an outline of some of the theoretical implications of these orientations, see Kielian-Gilbert 2003, especially 68–75.





[illegible]

**Example 9. Repetition/restatement of motive forms:**  $\hat{5}-\hat{1}$  (ascending = square brackets; dotted brackets = 7, transitional);  $\hat{1}-\hat{5}$  (circles); translational projections (dotted lines); contour pattern (circled notes, upper line)

(with two or more cadences), tonal region (less than two cadences), tonicization (no cadence), secondary dominant, or chromatic note. The “plastic sheet analogy” of tonal relationship conjures up implications comparable to the determinate layering of the see-through plastic sheets in encyclopedic reference books of the human body, showing the buildup of increasing specificity—greater determinacy—

through different layers of organization ("plastic sheets") of organs, veins and arteries, muscle tissue, etc., over a structural skeleton. Other metaphors of replication through processes of displacement—anticipation, projection, delay, spatialization, or translation in space-time—capture intuitions of the assertion of an idea via successive articulation (through repetition, iteration, sequence, or restatement).

**Example 10. Translational combination: *stretto*, mm. 6–8**  
(see note names in Example 8)

ally exclusive of the others but potentially shaped and enriched by them and potentially enriching to them.

Example 8 reads the elaborated chorale melody for embedded, successive, and overlapping orientations of tonal-harmonic patterns expressive of the “Das alte Jahr” motive. An aural image of “bells tolling,” developed at the outset of this essay, is expressive of the slow rate (“chiming”) of the progression, of the qualities of nested presentations that embed faster within slower iterations (as smaller, higher-pitched bells might sound in faster succession in relation to larger, lower-pitched ones), and of the resonance (and “over-tones”) created by the slower and faster motions sounding together. Further, the tonal-harmonic “chiming” of A4–G4–E4 in m. 1 of the melody expresses (or implies) the potential of dominant or tonic elaboration in the chorale melody. Specifically, the “Das alte Jahr” pattern of the chorale, A4–G4–E4 (F), is elaborated in spans of different length, supporting scale-steps in D minor:  $\hat{5}\text{--}\hat{4}\text{--}\hat{2}$  (A–G–E) ( $\hat{3}$ , F). Yet, alternately, there is potential for these pitches to be construed as scale-steps in A minor:  $\hat{8}\text{--}\hat{7}\text{--}\hat{5}$  (A–G–E) ( $\hat{6}$ , F), an ambiguity interpreted in Example 11.<sup>22</sup> In the following reading of the chorale prelude, the joining and particular combining of D minor and A minor and their ambiguities and transformations, one into the other over the course of the chorale prelude, is expressive of a particular joining of thanksgiving and prayer to grief and despair. As shown in Figure 2 (as well as in Example 8), the “Das alte Jahr” melodic-harmonic-tonal/modal pattern “chimes” in each of the twelve measures of the chorale prelude.

<sup>22</sup> In her study of aspects of Bach’s “modal chorales,” Lori Burns discusses how particular melodic-harmonic features can support a modal reading of a passage. The approach taken in this study focuses on tonal readings, but the distinctions and interactions between prolongational, associative, and overlapping presentations could also encompass

the implications of modal orientations of aspects of this chorale prelude (e.g., allowing the features of dorian vs. aeolian interaction to emerge, or identities related to formations of the dorian scale in contrast to, or interaction with, tonal formations). See Burns 1995, 155 (dorian vs. aeolian), and 77–82 (phrygian vs. tonal).

D (minor):  $\hat{5}$        $(\hat{6})$   $\hat{4}$   $\hat{2}$   $\hat{3}$   
 A (minor):  $\hat{1}$        $(\flat\hat{2})$   $\hat{7}$   $\hat{5}$   $\hat{6}$



**Example 11.** “Das alte Jahr vergangen ist,” BWV 614, mm. 1–4, analysis of first two phrases of the chorale prelude (see note names in Example 8)

- Line 1: A–G–E (F), mm. 1–2, 3 times  
 Line 2: A–G–E (F), mm. 2–4, 3 times  
 Line 3: E–D–B (C), mm. 4–6/7  
 Line 4: C–B $\flat$ –G (A), mm. 7–8, in F major  
 Line 4: A–G–E (F), mm. 7–8, tonally open-ended, with overlapping patterns (“stretto”)  
 Line 5: A–G–E (F E), mm. 8–10, 2–3 times, tonally open-ended  
 Line 6: B–A–F $\sharp$  (G $\sharp$ ), mm. 10–12, 2–3 times, tonally open-ended

**Figure 2.** Successive and embedded chiming patterns in the elaborated chorale melody, lines 1–6

Example 9 features a reading of the motive-forms of the chromatic figure,<sup>23</sup> the directed filling-in of chromatic linear spans from  $\hat{5}$  to  $\hat{1}$ . These ascending or descending trajectories are shown by brackets; spans from  $\hat{1}$  to  $\hat{5}$  are shown by circles. This experiential reading senses or construes pattern repetitions as shifts in temporal space. Contrasting the bracketed forms are diagonals that relate or shift note connections of the motive-forms to particular note expressions of the elaborated chorale tune.<sup>24</sup> Figure 3 shows how the motive-forms also transpire in each of the twelve measures of the chorale prelude.

Bach’s specification of “a 2 Clavier e Pedale” assigns the elaborated chorale melody to one manual, an obbligato part to the pedal, and “accompany-

<sup>23</sup> This figure had the rhetorical name *passus duriusculus* (hard step). See Stinson 1996, 110 (“dissonant step”).

<sup>24</sup> The aural-conceptual differences of “hearing” a “bracket” (Example 9, motive forms) in contrast or in relation to a “slur” (Examples 10–12) have deep significance for tonal

hearing as discussed above. In sketching prolongational relationships, care is normally taken to avoid “crossing slurs,” a situation in which each grouping would indicate a prolongational reading that would mutually exclude, or contradict, the other (e.g., hearing overlapping prolongations of dominant and tonic harmonies). See Kielian-Gilbert 2003.

- Line 1: mm. 1–2,  $\hat{5}-\hat{1}$  in D minor, 3 times  
 Line 2: mm. 3–4,  $\hat{5}-\hat{1}$  in D minor, 3 times, with textural exchange of voices, mm. 1–4 (invertible counterpoint<sup>a</sup>)  
 Line 3: mm. 4–5,  $\hat{5}-\hat{1}$  in D minor?, 2 times, with one-time ornamented line  $\hat{5}-\hat{1}$  in D minor?  
 Line 3: mm. 5–6,  $\hat{5}-\hat{1}$  in A minor, 2 times; and  $\hat{1}-\hat{5}$  in A minor, 2 times, with textural exchange of voices, mm. 5–6 (invertible counterpoint)  
 Line 4: mm. 6–8,  $\hat{1}-\hat{5}$  in A minor, 2 times; and  $\hat{5}-\hat{1}$  in D minor, 2 times  
 Line 5: mm. 8–10,  $\hat{5}-\hat{1}$  in G minor, once;  $\hat{1}-\hat{5}$ , once, in D minor?  
 Line 6: mm. 10–12,  $\hat{1}-\hat{5}$ , once, in A minor;  $\hat{1}-\hat{5}$  (in m. 1), once, in D minor?;  $\hat{5}-\hat{1}$ , in A minor?, ornamented line

<sup>a</sup>Stinson (1996, 110) also noted the invertible counterpoint of measures 1–4 (phrases 1–2) but does not point out the correlative invertible counterpoint of measures 5–6 (phrase 3).

**Figure 3. Motive-forms: chromatic filling in of linear spans from  $\hat{5}$  to  $\hat{1}$ , lines 1–6 (successive and overlapping motive presentations; see Example 9)**

ing” role to the remaining manual, and thus the note interactions between the right and left hands of the performer are timbrally specific. These material conditions both direct and constrain the contrapuntal/harmonic hearing of the prelude.<sup>25</sup> Emerging from and participating in these orientations (prolongational, associative, and overlapping/stretto) is the elaborated (solo) “voice,” increasing in diminutions, registral ascent, and degrees of chromaticism.

The chorale prelude begins with an emphasis toward a potential D minor in the first two chorale phrases. Phrase 2 repeats and elaborates phrase 1 with subtle distinctions of harmonic expression; compare mm. 1–3 and mm. 2–4. The localized emphasis (severity) of the A4 and A3 octave begins a series of “dominant” to tonic motions in embedded waves over the course of mm. 1–4. Phrases 1 and 2 give successive presentations of the upper-line melodic pattern A–G–E, counterpointed with intervals 8–6–3 (m. 1) and with 6–(10–7)–5 (end of m. 1 into downbeat of m. 2). In turn, these patterns embed larger patterns of connection from A–G–E (F) that encompass mm. 1–2, 3–4, and 1–4. One residue of this “chiming” is a localized chromaticism—the particular “ringing” of semitonal pairs that express recurring split thirds and sixths within the larger-scale succession and embeddings (prolongational parallelism) of the pattern in mm. 3–4 and over the course of mm. 1–4. See the harmonic settings

<sup>25</sup> See Smith 2001 and 2006. Another setting of “Das Alte Jahr vergangen ist” is BWV 1091 for organ (manuals), one of the Neumeister chorale settings assigned to the period before the *Orgelbüchlein*, possibly in Bach’s earliest period before 1705. See Wolff 1999.

of the A–G–E (F) patterns in m. 1 shown in Example 11: G over B $\flat$ –B, C–C $\sharp$  over bass A, and D over F $\sharp$ –F.

The chiming of, and localized chromatic “ringing” within, the elaborated A–G–E (F) patterns of the chorale tune combine in particular ways with the motivic (translational) repetitions of chromatically directed melodic spans from  $\hat{5}$  to  $\hat{1}$  or from  $\hat{1}$  to  $\hat{5}$  in the (left-hand) manual 2 and pedal that are detailed in Example 9 and Figure 3. Through textural inversion in mm. 3–4 (see the crossed arrows in Example 9), the descending pattern in the pedal (m. 1, from A3 to D3) and the ascending patterns in manual 2 (m. 1, from A3 to D4) link the repetition of the text phrase “The old year has passed” in phrases 1 and 2. Phrase 2 thus articulates linearly the ending on D minor (third beat of m. 4). This linear approach (from A2 to D3) propels the third phrase of the chorale (“We give thanks to you,” fourth beat of m. 4), in which the ascending chromatic figure appears for the first time in the ornamented chorale tune. The apparent arrival on D5 (tonic? third beat of m. 5) completes a vertical diminished seventh sonority (G $\sharp$ –B–D–F), compromising the tonic potential of D in an encounter with tonal forces of death and decay, but also marking the creative emergence of a new tonal area (A minor). As shown in Example 9, the upper line of mm. 5–7 embellishes the third phrase of the harmonized chorale, A4–B4–C $\sharp$ 5–D5, A4–C5–B4–A4, drawing from the depths of D minor (m. 4, pedal) and returning to those depths (mm. 5–6 pedal) by means of the G $\sharp$ –B–D–F diminished seventh of A minor, which points toward the new tonal space of the silent text of phrase 3, “We thank thee, O our God today.”

Proposing specific interpretations of the melodic-harmonic-tonal interactions in light of the text may be problematic for a chorale-prelude setting that is not verse specific. In other senses however, the vertical, linear, and overlapping presentations deeply connect and invest the music aesthetic of the elaborated voice (and silent text) with material content. The elaborated voice of the chorale prelude “sings” phrases 1 and 2, twice ending with a melodic continuation E4–F4 as  $\hat{2}$ – $\hat{3}$ ; in phrase 3 this voice acquires new registral and harmonic/melodic emphases, A4–B $\flat$ 4–B4–C5–C $\sharp$ 5–D5, the last pitch now pivoting toward A minor. What follows is an A-minor close in m. 6, C5–B4–A4 as  $\hat{3}$ – $\hat{2}$ – $\hat{1}$ , that articulates the mention of “Jesu Christ.” That pattern also marks the first time in the piece that double (invertible) counterpoint motivates the continuation into a new chorale-prelude phrase, 4, in distinctive overlapping, stretto-like presentations. The “overflow” of the A-minor orientation links the mention of “great danger” in phrase 4 (*grosser G'fahr*) with the possibility of “merciful protection” in phrases 5 and 6 (*gnädiglich behüt*). Finally, the ornamented voice of chorale-prelude phrases 5 and 6 closes by a double (textual) and motivic reference to the fragment *dies Jahr*, F–E ( $\hat{6}$ – $\hat{5}$ ) in m. 10 and A–G $\sharp$  ( $\hat{4}$ – $\hat{3}$ ) in m. 12—“sigh” patterns that spawn further appoggiaturas C5–B4 and E5–D $\sharp$ 5 in m. 12. Does the striking sound of the F $\sharp$ 4 in m. 10 (manual 1) bring the stepwise descending chromaticism to the melody in addition to the accompanying parts? Does it expressively delay the “expected” rhythmic arrival of F4

in the ornamented line via F $\sharp$ 4? Does it recall “major-mode” references from sung versions of the chorale tune (see Example 7[a], phrases 1–4)? Does it occasion all of the above?

As the ornamented voice “sings,” the patterned presentations of manual 2 and pedal in chorale-prelude phrases 4–6 further activate the embedding, succession, and overlap of previous  $\hat{5}$ – $\hat{4}$ – $\hat{2}$  ( $\hat{3}$ ) harmonic-tonal patterns. The distinctions—V–I in D minor versus I–IV in A minor—actualize within and between the course of phrases 1–2 (D minor) and 3 (A minor). With phrase 4 ensues the greatest degree of overlapping patterns and the harmonic-tonal-modal “blended” progression of melodic patterns suggestive of A minor, F major, and D minor. This overlapping of recurring, descending melodic patterns suggests the interlinking/intervening of tonal-modal implications, as shown in Example 10 and Figure 4. A “hidden” (silent?) repetition of the third melodic phrase of the chorale, A3–B3–C $\sharp$ 4–D4, A4–C5–(B $\flat$ 4)–A4, embeds in the upper part of manual 2 in conjunction with the melody in m. 7 (see the circled parts in m. 7 in Example 9).<sup>26</sup> Does the “secret embedding” of the tune of phrase 3 (A minor), “We thank thee, O our God today,” have symbolic significance in connecting the text of thanks with that of danger and divine protection in phrases 4–6?

**Upper line:**

mm. 6                      7  
(E/A–D/B)   C–B–B $\flat$ —A————G—E————F

**Descending patterns in stretto:**

(E—D)—B—A(C)————A [E–D–B (A/C), A minor]  
                  C—B $\flat$ ————G————A [C–B $\flat$ –G (A/F), F major]  
                          A—G—E—F [A–G–E (F), D minor]

Pedal:            A–G $\sharp$ —G—F $\sharp$ —F–E–D—G—E—A—D

Fig. bass            10–10–10–10–10            10–7–10

**Figure 4. Overlapping motive forms, mm. 6–8 (“stretto”)**

Simulating a continuation of the previous sequential overlapping, the particular “arrival” of D minor in m. 8 is less an arrival than another initiation, spawning a subsequent descending series of fifths, a recessive succession of passing intervals that are themselves suggestive of a series of implied/unrealized dominants over the course of mm. 10–12, as Example 12 details: D (V of G minor, m. 10, beat 1),<sup>27</sup> A (V of D minor, m. 10, beat 3), and E (V of A

<sup>26</sup> This embedding is also depicted by Brinkman (1980, 66), in the context of a study of recurring contour patterns in the *Orgelbüchlein*.

<sup>27</sup> The D of m. 8 locally suggests G major/minor in mm. 9 and 10 but without fully articulating that relationship (a locally disorienting effect?) and then continues to A (m. 10) and E (as V of A minor, m. 1) to initiate the cycle again.

mm. [8]      [9]      [10]      [11]      [12]      [1] [2]

A—G—E      B—A—F#

(V/F)      (V/g)      (V/d)      E: iv6      V7 I?      (B) E      A      D

ascending 5ths      descending 5ths

**Example 12. Cyclic patterns (ascending and descending fifths), mm. 9–12, 1–2, phrases 5 and 6**

minor, m. 12, beat 1).<sup>28</sup> This “closing” succession of (unfulfilled) dominants is broken with the resumption and repetition of the beginning of the chorale and the singing of a new verse (marking the new beginning of the year), initiating the harmonic cycle again. In this sense, the E major close (V of A minor) cycles back to the A major of the beginning of the chorale prelude (A major now positioned as V7 of D minor). As the tonal-harmonic cycles begin again, so do the melodic patterns chromatically descend from A to E (m. 11, manuals, to m. 12, pedal, A3 to E2), and from D to A (mm. 11–12 to m. 1, beginning of piece, D3 to A2).

What is the experiential effect of such intense melodic-harmonic saturation of musical temporal space? Is this web of harmonic-tonal-contrapuntal organization so tightly controlled that the aesthetic fascination of its organization completely contains it? Are its compositional relationships thereby fixed and closed to the outside? How might musical moments “escape” such scrutiny and open themselves to us, or us to them?

I have suggested that attending to the encounters and temporal interactions between harmonic-tonal, melodic, and overlapping stretto-like presentations in the chorale prelude spurs a differential experience that brings new expressive potentials to particular spheres of attention. That which is normally or conventionally outside an orientation can reshape it from the inside. In a similar way, attention to particular receptions can work analytically such that aspects of one orientation can energize creative differences from within

<sup>28</sup> This reading contrasts with that of Stinson (1996, 111), who noted that the *appoggiatura* “sighs” and drastic slowing of the harmonic rhythm “thoroughly hide the chorale tune” for the first time in the piece.



another.<sup>29</sup> Reception of the *Orgelbüchlein* chorale preludes in the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries construct contemporary ways of listening to Bach's compositional improvisations. Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel's listening expresses the separation of chromatic linearity and diatonic modality in dramatic terms; in an interpretive turn, Bach responds with an elaborated voice that dips in and out and sails above a chromatically woven temporal fabric. For Berg, analysis in "chorale style" is not simply placing one harmony after another but hearing Schoenberg's melody in, or internal to, those harmonies and rhythmically imbuing their connection; in this interpretive turn, Bach responds with a thorough working out of one motive or texture in the accompaniment that sets the pacing of the harmonic and melodic unfolding. "Listening" multiply to the prelude "Das alte Jahr vergangen ist" gives outward expression to the "preluding" of this piece, to interactive potentials of its receptions, and to new ways of experiencing and understanding the passing of the old and the emergence of the new.

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<sup>29</sup> A selected list of transcriptions of the *Orgelbüchlein* preludes, including those by Ferruccio Busoni and Max Reger, is given in Stinson 1996. Stinson omits the "pedagogical" setting of the chorales by Marcel Dupré (1960). In Dupré's reading, no. 17, "Das alte Jahr vergangen ist," receives a

modal setting in five phrases, each two bars and the last with no anacrusis. Interestingly, and related to the setting by Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel, the final two (of five) phrases end on an E-major triad.

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