

Strungk's Lament: On Mothers, Death, and Counterpoint

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GIVEN THE CENTRAL ROLE MOTHERS have so often played in musical households, it is striking how rare are the compositions by their cherished offspring marking their deaths. While the demise of some wealthy and powerful women offered the occasion for official musical homage in Lutheran Germany,¹ one searches largely in vain for more personal memorials to a mother by a musical son or—even more unlikely—by a musical daughter. The paucity of surviving works by musicians dedicated to their mothers is thrown into stark relief by one extraordinary exception to the rule: Nicolaus Adam Strungk's *Ricercar* written to commemorate the death of his beloved mother in 1685—*Ricercar Sopra la Morte della mia carissima Madre Catharina Maria Stubenrauen Morsa a Brunsviga il 28 d'Augusto ao 1685 Venet: il 20 Decemb: 1685*. Composed in Italy, far from home, by one of the most wide-ranging and fascinating (though now largely forgotten) German composers of the later seventeenth century, this complex, moving keyboard work combines pathos and erudition and not only marks the death of the composer's mother but also draws attention to the larger repertoire's filial silence.

There are of course funerary tributes to women by men, such as Heinrich Schütz's *Klaglied* of 1625 memorializing his dead spouse Magdalena: the piece is a simple continuo song presumably intended for domestic performance as a means of consolation.² Yet more high-minded, professional tributes from one musician to another who has died are overwhelmingly masculine, composed by a man for a dead male colleague; the statement holds in the seventeenth century for the tradition of composing melancholic tombeaux in France as it does for the widespread practice of producing complex works in learned coun-

¹ See, for example, Johann Sebastian Bach's *Trauerode* (BWV 198) for the death of the Saxon Electress Christiane Eberhardine in 1727. For an account of several laments on the death of women, including family members of composers (but not from sons to mothers), see Stephen Rose, "Hermann Schein's Occasional Music and the Social Order in 1620s Leipzig," *Early Music History* 23 (2004): 253–84, at 267, 273–76.

² Rose, "Schein's Occasional Music," 273.

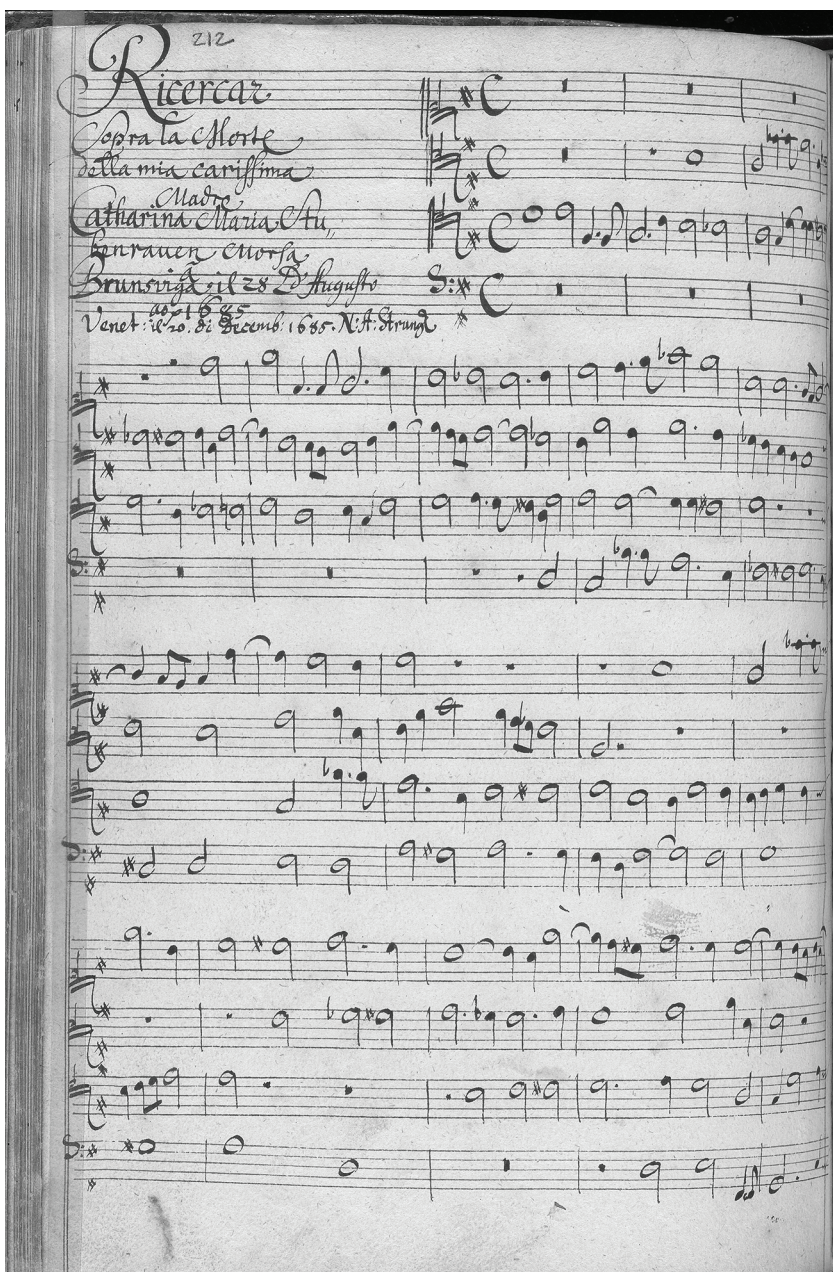


Figure 1 Strunck, Ricercar sopra la Morte... (Yale University, LM 5056, p 212)

terpoint as memorials to dead peers in north Germany.³ Such erudite compositions were meant partly to show intellectual and artistic kinship between the male author and the object of his tribute. Since women rarely composed they were generally deemed unworthy of such lofty musical memorials. Royals, aristocrats, and wealthy burgers were exceptions: lofty social status could imply the intellectual accomplishment and refinement of high-born women, but more importantly this standing alone might demand sumptuous musical homage.

While funeral sermons were given for women, only families with sufficient means could afford this honor.⁴ These sermons typically consisted of much more than generic acknowledgments of familial affection buttressed by theological platitudes: often sermons such as these, along with commemorative poems, exhibited real tenderness, highlighting the deceased's concrete contributions to the lives of the survivors. Consider, as just one of countless examples, a pamphlet issued in 1694 by the four sons of the Carpzov family, a jurisprudential and theological dynasty in Saxony. The title of the 1694 publication commemorating the burial of their mother, Anna Kunigunda Carpzov, emphasizes the heart-rending nature of the surviving sons' loss: "On the most painful death and Burial ... of their highly honored Mother,"⁵ and goes on to describe how her four "unhappy surviving sons shed their children's tears."⁶ The four printed poems, one by each of the sons, praise the mother's role as advice-giver; the verses of the eldest, the physician Christian Benedikt Carpzov, promise "not only to honor the valuable lessons you so faithfully gave me, but also to carry them through in deed."⁷ Love, respect, and art mingle in these tributes to the mother, whose body lay nearby in its coffin when these poems were delivered at the funeral.

³ There are exceptions to these male-to-male tributes, such as Denis Gaultier's *Tombeau de Mlle Gaultier*. Froberger also composed a meditation on the future death of a woman, though a sovereign: *Meditation ... sur la Mort future de Madam Sibylle, Duchess de Wirtemberg*

⁴ See the *Gesamtkatalog deutschsprachiger Leichenpredigten* of the *Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur Mainz* at <http://www.personalschriften.de/datenbanken/gesa.html>.

⁵ Johann Benedikt Carpzov, Gottfried Benedikt Carpzov, Christian Benedict Carpzov, and Samuel Benedikt Carpzov, *Über den höchstschmerzlichen Tod und Begräbniß ... Ihrer Hoch zu Ehrenden Frau Mutter/ Frauen Anna Kunigund/ gebohrner Göringern* (Leipzig: Christian Solvein, 1694).

⁶ "Dero hinterlassene unglückselige Söhne [vergießen] ihre kindliche Thränen." Ibid.

⁷ "Ich wil die schönen Lehren/ Die Sie mir oft treulich gab/ nicht nur im Bedancken ehren/ Sondern in der That vollführn." Ibid., 4.

The title of Strungk's tribute to his mother recalls that of the volume of memorializing poems written by the Carpzov sons and, more directly in the realm of music, the tombeaux of Johann Jacob Froberger as well as the tributes in complex counterpoint of Strungk's north German contemporaries.⁸ The full title of Strungk's *Ricercar sopra la Morte*, a piece that survives in a single source (see Figure 1), is remarkable not just for its length, its ardent declaration of filial love ("my most beloved mother"), and the use of the deceased's maiden name as if in an attempt to return her to an independent identity,⁹ but also—and perhaps even more poignantly—for its chronological and geographical exactitude: the place and dates of both the mother's death and the composition itself are noted precisely, as if these words were to be engraved on a tombstone rather than written into the leaves of a manuscript. Tombstone is after all the original meaning of the word "tombeau," and the restless, melancholic traveller Froberger (whose music Strungk almost certainly knew) was also frequently detailed with respect to the time and place of his compositions, most famously in his "Reflections on his Future Death" for which he noted that he had composed the piece in Paris on May 1, 1660.¹⁰ When Strungk composed the *Ricercar sopra la Morte*, he was in Italy, far from his native land, travelling in the entourage of his employer, the Duke of Hanover, a devotee of Venetian opera. The information conveyed by the title about the vast distance from the departed mother, who had died in Braunschweig, makes the piece's emotions appear sharper. The peripatetic Strungk had apparently received the news of his mother's death long after the fact: the composition is dated some three months later than the event it commemorates. This implies that the *Ricercar* was not written for a public performance at a burial, but rather as a purely personal tribute.



⁸ See, for example, Froberger's famous *Lamento sopra la dolorosa perdita della Real Maestà di Ferdinando IV* from the *Livre de 1656*. It is almost certain that Strungk knew at least some of Froberger's music.

⁹ The use of the woman's pre-married name is found frequently in the Lutheran burial sermons and is typical, for example, of several of the publications prepared on Anna Carpzov's death. See Johann Gottfried Diesseldorf, *Das Empfindlichste Weh wolte Bey frühzeitigen Hintritt Der ... Frauen Anna Kunigunda gebohrner Göringern* (Leipzig: Krüger, 1694).

¹⁰ *Meditation faite sur ma mort future* (FbWV 620).

Nicolaus Adam Strungk was born in 1640 in Braunschweig, where his father, Delphin, was a famed organist.¹¹ As a boy, Nicolaus Adam probably already played the organ in the city's churches. Later he was sent north to study the violin with Nathanael Schnittelbach in Lübeck, where he met Franz Tunder, Buxtehude's predecessor as organist at St. Mary's Church. By 1660 Strungk was employed as a violinist in Celle, birthplace of his mother and the city where his parents had married in 1636. Two years later Strungk journeyed to Vienna and played for Emperor Leopold I, an enthusiast of learned counterpoint, who bestowed on the visitor a coveted gold chain. During the sojourn Strungk established a lasting friendship with Johann Heinrich Schmeltzer, the renowned Viennese violinist who would become imperial Kapellmeister. Aside from being a talented keyboardist, Strungk was also one of his generation's greatest performers on the violin: Mattheson claims that on a subsequent trip to Vienna—perhaps the one in 1686 when he composed his last dated keyboard work, the *Capriccio primi tuoni*—he played both violin and keyboard for the Emperor and was rewarded with another gold chain.¹² In an anecdote retailed only at the end of the eighteenth century by John Hawkins in his *General History*, Strungk is in Rome accompanying Arcangelo Corelli on the harpsichord. After prodding Strungk to play the violin as well, Corelli is astounded by the German's demonic technical prowess at the instrument, declaring that “if I am the Archangel you are certainly the Archdevil.”¹³

After his tenure as chamber musician at Hanover, Strungk entered the vibrant music-theoretical tradition of Hamburg, becoming director of the city musicians and of the music in the Cathedral (a position later occupied by Johann Mattheson) in 1679, and remaining for three years. In Hamburg, Strungk would have come into contact and worked closely with Johann Theile, Johann Adam Reincken, and Johann Philipp Förtsch, who were all vital figures at the Hamburg opera. Theile's opera *Adam und Eva* had inaugurated Hamburg's

¹¹ Johann Gottfried Walther, *Musicalisches Lexicon* (Leipzig: Deer, 1732; repr. Leipzig: Bärenreiter, 1953), 583. The classic account of the Strungk family and Nicolaus Adam's life and works is Fritz Berend, *Nicolaus Adam Strungk, 1640–1700: Sein Leben und seine Werke* (Hanover: Homan, 1915).

¹² This is recounted in Johann Mattheson, *Grundlage einer Ehren-Pforte* (Hamburg: the author, 1740; repr. ed. Max Schneider, Berlin: Kommissionsverlag von Leo Liepmannssohn, 1910), 191. For more on Strungk as violinist, see Brian Brooks, *The Emergence of the Violin as a Solo Instrument in Early Seventeenth-Century Germany* (PhD diss., Cornell University, 2002), 239–45.

¹³ John Hawkins, *A General History of the Science and Practice of Music* (London, 1776, rev. ed. London: Novello, 1875), 676.

Gänsemarkt Opera House in 1678, the year before Strungk's arrival in the city. Strungk would go on to become the most important composer for the Hamburg opera during the first half of the 1680s, continuing to compose for the city's theater even after his return to service in Hanover in 1682.

The Hanover post entailed repeated journeys with the Duke and his retinue to Venice for Carnival and the opera. Strungk was released from ducal service in 1686 after having returned from Venice to Germany without permission; one wonders if the death of his mother precipitated his departure, especially as his aged father survived his wife and lived on into his eighties in Braunschweig. After his Hanoverian service, Strungk went on to become Vice-Kapellmeister and chamber organist in Dresden, before being elevated to Kapellmeister after the death of Christoph Bernhard; Strungk then founded the Leipzig opera in 1692, eight years before his own death in 1700.

Strungk's short stay in Hamburg seems to have had a decisive influence on his approach to keyboard music, and the eventual composition of the *Ricercar* on the death of his mother. Strungk's Hamburg colleagues Theile, Reincken, and Förtsch not only composed operas for the Hamburg theatre, but they were also avid theorists and practitioners of complex counterpoint who experimented with inverted counterpoint and canon, made annotated collections of complex contrapuntal techniques, and wrote and collated treatises on them. Theile became known as the "Father of the Contrapuntists" on account of his investigations into contrapuntal permutations and combinations.¹⁴ This was a group of musicians dedicated both to the drama of opera and to seemingly esoteric musical research. It is in this public sphere of operatic modernity and the more private discourse of counterpoint that we should understand Strungk's Hamburg years, and, indeed, his keyboard works composed in that city and elsewhere. Strungk's broader interest in contrapuntal keyboard music is documented by the survival of seven capriccios and two *ricercars* written in open score, a notational practice used in south Germany and Italy by Froberger and his teacher Girolamo Frescobaldi, among others, and rare in the North; the presentation on the page immediately bespeaks high-minded seriousness.¹⁵

¹⁴ Jacob Adlung, *Anleitung zu der musikalischen Gelahrtheit* (Erfurt: J. D. Jungnicol sen., 1758; repr. Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1953), 184.

¹⁵ The most important exception is Samuel Scheidt's *Tabulatura nova* (Halle, 1624). In the *Musicalischer Compositions Tractat* by Strungk's sometime Hamburg colleague Johann Philipp Förtsch (Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Mus. ms. theor. 300), Frescobaldi's *ricercars* are given as an example of how multiple subjects could be combined using the precepts of invertible counterpoint. After many productive years at the Hamburg Opera in the 1680s, Förtsch turned from

The craftsmanship and flair of Strungk's compositions ensured their popularity among subsequent generations; his keyboard works circulated widely in manuscript in central Germany, and both Bach and Handel copied his music into the volumes they compiled as youths.¹⁶ C. P. E. Bach cited Strungk as one of the influences on his father, and Handel "borrowed" music from two of Strungk's keyboard pieces for use in his own vocal music. Like Bach, Handel must have copied Strungk's music into his youthful notebooks, and did not forget Strungk's *Ricercar sopra la Morte*, for he used its middle section for the chorus "From Crime to Crime He Blindly Goes" in his 1739 oratorio *Saul*. The young Bach would also have learned much from Strungk's research into contrapuntal material—his genius for combining multiple themes and overlapping them in close strettos, his adventurous harmonic language, and his ability to use counterpoint for striking emotional effect.

There must have been many other keyboard players, aside from Handel and Bach, who copied, admired, and learned Strungk's music, yet only a single source containing all nine pieces survives—the so-called Lowell Mason Codex now at Yale University (shelfmark LM 5056). The manuscript was copied between 1684 and 1688 by the Dresden organist Emanuel Benisch, whose initials and the year 1688 adorn the cover of the volume. It contains the work of Italians and north and south Germans, from Vienna to Lübeck, and is an important source for Buxtehude's music; it also transmits works by Froberger, Poglietti, Kerll, and others.¹⁷ Strungk arrived in Dresden in 1688 and it seems likely that with Strungk's arrival in the Saxon capital, Benisch gained access to the now-lost autograph copies that the new Electoral chamber organist had brought with him and that documented his travels across Europe. The careful inscriptions in the manuscript suggest proximity to the originals.

The other main source for Strungk's keyboard works survives in Vienna, an important center for contrapuntal keyboard music and a repeated stop in

music to medicine, working as a court physician in Schleswig for the Bishop of Lübeck. The *Tractat* therefore most likely dates from the 1680s.

¹⁶ Robert Hill, "Der Himmel weiss, wo diese Sachen hingekommen sind": Reconstructing the Lost Keyboard Notebooks of the Young Bach and Handel," in *Bach, Handel, Scarlatti: Tercentenary Essays*, ed. Peter Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 161–72.

¹⁷ For the provenance and other matters pertaining to this manuscript, see Kerala Snyder, *Dieterich Buxtehude: Organist in Lübeck* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2007), 347–48. For a list of the contents of the manuscript, see Friedrich Wilhelm Riedel, *Quellenkundliche Beiträge zur Geschichte der Musik für Tasteninstrumente in der zweiten Hälfte des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1960), 106–11.

Strungk's itinerary.¹⁸ This manuscript contains seven of the nine surviving works and suggests that the Viennese scribe received access to Strungk's collection, either directly or indirectly, as it stood before the traveler's final journeys south in 1685 and 1686 when the last pieces were composed—the *Ricercar sopra la Morte* on December 20, 1685 in Venice and the *Capriccio primi tuoni* on July 8, 1686 in Vienna. The Viennese source is further remarkable for the fact that indications of Strungk's authorship—his name as well as places and dates associated with his journeys and musical posts—were at some point rubbed out and replaced by the name of “Giorgio Reutter” (i.e., George Reutter, the Younger), then the Imperial organist in Vienna.¹⁹ In spite of these obvious and highly suspect erasures, it was under Reutter's name that these seven compositions of the Vienna source—six capricci and one ricercar—first appeared in a modern edition in 1906 under the auspices of the *Denkmäler der Tonkunst in Österreich*. While musical dictionaries and library catalogs have long corrected this error of attribution, so that one could find Strungk in the DTÖ edition, the confusion has surely fueled the prevailing ignorance of Strungk's significant contribution to the keyboard music of the seventeenth century. That only the first seven works were published in the DTÖ also explains why the magnificent *Ricercar sopra la Morte*—a monument to the keyboard ricercar and a unique tribute by a seventeenth-century composer to his mother—remains so little known. This musical gravestone was excavated in the form of a modern edition of Strungk's complete keyboard music only in 2007.²⁰



While the notation adopted by Strungk—and the language of the inscription—place the *Ricercar* in the Italian tradition, the piece also reflects the practice of commemorating the deaths of musicians and reflecting on one's own mortality with strict counterpoint. As I have argued elsewhere, the procedures of learned counterpoint were cultivated by Theile, Buxtehude, and others as a way of alle-

¹⁸ Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Cod. 18731.

¹⁹ For a full list and chronology see Riedel, *Quellenkundliche Beiträge*, 184–88.

²⁰ Nicolaus Adam Strungk, *Sämtliche Orgelwerke: Capricci, Ricercare*, ed. Klaus Beckmann (Mainz: Schott, 2007). In 1900 Max Seiffert made an edition of one of the capricci and the *Ricercar sopra la Morte* (though without the full inscription and with only passing reference to the event the piece commemorates): Nik. Adam Strunck, *Zwei Doppelfugen*, ed. Max Seiffert, in *Organum*, series 4, no. 18 (Kistner & Siegel: Lippstadt, 1900). Seiffert's edition halves the note values and includes various performance indications not in the original manuscript; it is available online at <https://urresearch.rochester.edu/institutionalPublicationPublicView.action?institutionalItemId=16880>

gorizing the movements of the heavens and, in turn, the heavenly concert: strict counterpoint represented the music of the transfigured dead performing now with the angels.²¹ Partly for this reason, I believe, Strungk's chosen genre of maternal commemoration is not the halting *style brisé* of Froberger and the tombeaux of his French models, although elements of this gestural approach can be heard in the *Ricercar sopra la Morte*. Noble and anguished, the work achieves its unique power through both erudition and emotion, for it is anything but a cold, purely cerebral exercise; the carefully conceived and dramatically deployed fugal procedures do serve as objects of intellectual contemplation, but they also produce a heightened affect of sorrow whose goal is catharsis. Through his use of melodic inversion, invertible counterpoint, and stretto, Strungk invokes the music of heaven while at the same time using these procedures to dramatize the worldly realities of grief, anguish, and loss.



Example 1 Strungk, *Ricercar...*, mm 1–3

The subject begins with a whole step ascent followed by a dramatic leap downward a minor seventh (see Example 1; the full score of the *Ricercar* can be found in the appendix to this article and a complete recording is included as Track 1 on the CD accompanying this volume). The leap is an emphatic gesture, but also an ambiguous one: does it project dire sorrow or brave hope? In the *Tractatus compositionis augmentatus* by the Hamburg Director of Music Christoph Bernhard—himself a master of learned counterpoint and a composer who famously used it to commemorate the death of a learned colleague²²—a skip involving an awkward interval is labeled a *saltus duriusculus* (a hard leap); while this category does include the minor seventh, Bernhard focuses on jumps of diminished intervals, particularly of the fourth and seventh.²³ Given the lament

²¹ See David Yearsley, *Bach and the Meanings of Counterpoint* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 1–41. I discuss the Strungk *Ricercar sopra la Morte* briefly on pages 17–18. See also, Yearsley, “Towards an Allegorical Interpretation of Buxtehude’s Funerary Counterpoints,” *Music & Letters* 80, no. 2 (1999): 183–206.

²² Christoph Bernhard, *Prudentia prudentiana* (1669) in *Geistliche Konzerte und andere Werke*, ed. Otto Dreschler (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1982). See also Yearsley, “Towards an Allegorical Interpretation,” 197–200.

²³ “Leaps of a regular seventh (e.g., major or minor) as well as of the ninth and other intervals



Example 2 Buxtehude, *Praeludium in G minor*, BuxWV 148, mm 1–3

presaged by the title, it would have been more likely to find in the *Ricercar* a signature of two flats, as in Buxtehude's *Praeludium in G minor*, BuxWV 148 whose subject has the same melodic shape as Strungk's (Example 2). Strungk recasts in the major mode a subject whose rhythmic and melodic profiles are more typically associated with a pathos played out chromatically across a minor key: the familiar is made strange.

These first four pitches are followed by a chromatic slide through a minor third; this gesture too would have worked well in the minor mode. In Example 1, I've labeled these two halves of the subject as subphrases *a* and *b*, the conjunct chromaticism of *b* contrasting with the central leap of *a*. Strungk demarcates the subphrases rhythmically by lengthening the G in measure 2 with the addition of a dot; this division of the theme will have important contrapuntal ramifications. Bernhard calls this chromatic motion a *passus duriusculus* (hard step) and describes it as an expression of sorrowful emotions.²⁴ Likewise, Andreas Werckmeister recommended the figure for conveying a "sad affect" (*trauriger affectus*).²⁵ Strungk confines the chromatic movement of the *b* subphrase to a minor third (C–B–B \flat –A), a partial descent through the entire six notes of the chromatic tetrachord that is the hallowed signal of lament.

Aside from its affective power, subphrase *b*, in both its rectus and inversus forms, offers rich contrapuntal possibilities that are ingeniously exploited by Strungk. Seventeenth-century composers recognized the contrapuntal potential of the chromatic tetrachord (in descending or ascending form) and its potential for close combination in stretto. Strungk quickly rehearses one possibility in the chromatic stretto in measure 13 between soprano and alto (for the passages referred to by measure numbers in the subsequent discussion of the *Ricercar* please make use of the edition included in this article's Appendix).

greater than the octave, are also employed more boldly today than in the past" (saltus Septimae regularis sowohl Nonae als anderer Intervallorum so über die Octave sind, setzet man itzo auch kühner als vor Alters). Christoph Bernhard, *Tractatus compositionis augmentatus* in *Die Kompositionslehre Heinrich Schützens in der Fassung seines Schülers Christoph Bernhard*, ed. Joseph Müller-Blattau, 2nd ed. (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1963), 78–79; Walter Hilse, "The Treatises of Christoph Bernhard," *Music Forum* 3 (1973): 31–196, at 105.

²⁴ Bernhard, *Tractatus*, 77–78; Hilse, "The Treatises of Christoph Bernhard," 103–4.

²⁵ Andreas Werckmeister, *Harmonologia musica* (Frankfurt and Leipzig: Calvisius, 1702; repr. Hildesheim: Olms, 1970), 13.



Example 3 *Strungk, Ricercar...*, excerpts

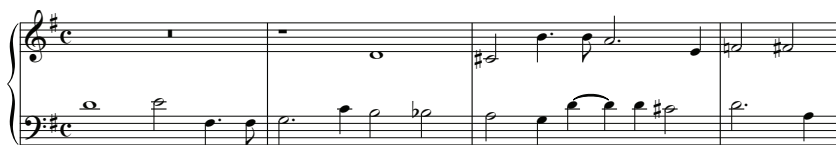
The *b* subphrase can also be superimposed on the *a* subphrase. These two elements of the subject can be placed above one another at different temporal and pitch intervals; Strungk demonstrates his contrapuntal acumen by shifting the *b* subphrase so that it comes in and out of phase with the *a* subphrase. He first examines the pliability of the *b* subphrase in the stretto that opens the piece (Example 3a). The third entry on the fourth beat of measure 4 demonstrates that the rectus form of the subject can also be superimposed on the *b* subphrase (Example 3b). The *b* subphrase is then heard above the opening of the subject in measure 20 (Example 3c). Examples 3d, 3e, and 3f illustrate other possibilities for superimposing the *a* and *b* subphrases.

But before fleshing out these and other aspects of his *elaboratio*, Strungk makes his most provocative and dramatic contrapuntal decision: he begins the entry of the second voice on D, a move that amplifies the harmonic confusion inherent in the subject (see Appendix, mm. 1–4). With the answer's opening two notes, the first of which comes in an overlapping stretto with the *b* subphrase in the tenor, the *Ricercar* announces that it has begun as what Förtsch, Johann Gottfried Walther, and many others called a *fuga contraria reversa* in which the contrary motion of the counterpoint preserves the exact relationship of whole and half steps.²⁶ Studying the score away from the keyboard or copying it out as the Dresden organist Emanuel Benisch did within a few years of the piece's composition, we can see that beginning the subject on the fifth scale degree of D will wrench the piece out of its major mode: the leap upward a minor seventh from the C♯ of the answer in measure 2 will land on a B♭ (in

²⁶ The contrapuntal subgenre's name as adopted by these German theorists seems to have originated with Giovanni Maria Bononcini, whose composition treatise was widely disseminated North of the Alps.



Example 4 Buxtehude, *Canzona in D minor*, BuxWV 168, mm 66–67



Example 5 Strungk, *Ricercar...*, opening reconceived without exact inversion between the voice and beginning the subject on D

measure 3); this contrapuntal move amounts to a violation of a cardinal rule of fugal writing, namely, that the answer should not depart from the key established by the opening statement of the subject. The B \flat has been heard already in the chromatic b subphrase of the subject, but this does not prepare the ear for the approach by upward leap of a minor seventh to a pitch that seems to negate G major.

Strungk well knew that there existed two far more conventional contrapuntal answers to his striking subject. The first would depart from the same note but not preserve the exact relationship of whole and half steps as, for example, in Buxtehude's *Canzona* in D minor (Example 4). Such a solution in Strungk's *Ricercar* would have been acceptable because of the glaring departure from G major that comes with the C \sharp (Example 5). As the Buxtehude *Canzona* makes clear, this kind of imitation works best with step-wise subjects, particularly those that outline the first and fifth degrees of the key. The other, less problematic, solution would be to begin the inversion on a different scale degree, following Bononcini's inversion tables for the *fuga contraria reversa*, found in

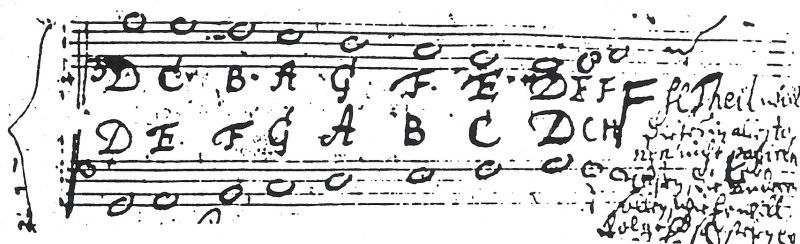


Figure 2 Inversion Table from Johann Philipp Förtsch, *Musicalischer Compositions Tractat* (Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Mus ms theor 300, fol 17v)



Example 6 Strungk, *Capriccio dalla Chiave A*, mm 40–43

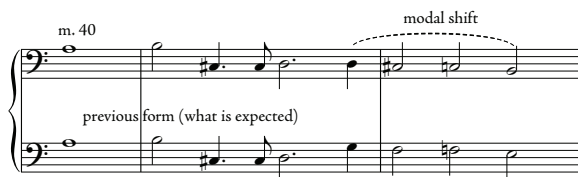


Example 7 Froberger, *Ricercar V* from the *Livre de 1658*, mm 1–7



Example 8 Strungk, *Ricercar...*, opening reconceived so that the answer is inverted according to Förtsch's table (see Figure 2)

the composition treatises of Förtsch, Österreich, and Walther. The simple rule that governs exact inversion such as this is that *mi* must be answered by *fa*, which is apparent in the inversion table in Figure 2, where B corresponds with F; in the case of Strungk's subject in G major, F# would be answered by C. Strungk adopted this conventional approach towards melodic inversion in the second half of his *Capriccio dalla Chiave A* (Example 6), and Froberger treated the problem in like fashion in the opening imitative complex of his *Ricercar V* from the *Livre de 1658* (Example 7). Indeed, Strungk employs exactly this relationship in the *Ricercar sopra la Morte* in the stretto pair in measures 38 and 39; this allows Strungk to begin the stretto a half-note earlier, increasing the overlap between the voices. Example 8 gives one possible version of this with a rhythmic adjustment to allow for stretto, analogous to the pair of entries in measures 38–39. Using this method of inversion at the beginning of the piece would have created a far greater degree of tonal balance between subject and answer. By adopting the much more striking, even iconoclastic, form of the answer Strungk achieves an effect that is the opposite of balance—one of precarious ambiguity. Yet it must also be observed that beginning the answer on the fifth scale degree results in the *b* subphrase arriving on the tonic of G



Example 9 Strungk, *Ricercar*..., mm 40–42

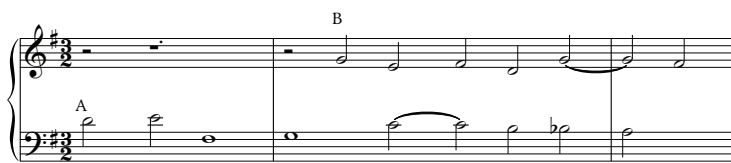
for its final note; this return to the apparent safety of the home key makes the unhinged leap up to the lowered third of the mode appear as a painful plaint, before the *passus duriusculus* ascends resolutely to conclude on the g^1 .

The effect of the major-minor ambiguity colors not only the local contrapuntal relationship but also the larger sense of tonal stability in the *Ricercar*. The absence of any viable cadences in the course of the first section adds to the sense of instability, particularly when the *rectus* and *inversus* versions of the subject, with their conflicting modal orientations, follow each other in close succession. Strungk extends this instability on a larger scale by highlighting the tension between the flat- and sharp-side moments in the piece, as in the juxtaposition of F major (downbeat of m. 31) and G major (downbeat of m. 32), a teetering between tonal areas wrought by the inverted form of the subject.

Dramatic ambiguity is also generated by Strungk's use of *inganno*, a contrapuntal technique in which the theme retains the same solmization syllables but uses different pitches; beginning in measure 39, he creates a network of four successive overlapping entries using different temporal spacings in what amounts to a modification of the pitch relationship between the *a* and *b* sub-phrases, as in the bass in measures 40 through 42 (Example 9). This device allows Strungk to introduce a stretto between bass and tenor at the space of one full measure. The technique appears again in the following measures (measures 43–45) for the stretto between soprano and bass, with the second voice—the bass—following at an even closer time interval, here just a half measure. The *inganno* (upbeat to measure 45) in the bass is answered at the octave in the alto (upbeat to measure 46) and leads to a three-voice stretto between alto, bass, and finally soprano. Strungk accelerates the pace as the first section pushes towards its climax; as with the unconventional approach to inversion, contrapuntal decisions serve rhetorical ends.

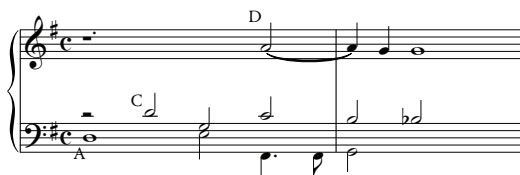
As Strungk moves toward the cadence at the end of the first section, he appears momentarily to have resolved the tonal conflict between major and minor modes with the *rectus stretto* of the subject in measures 43 through 45. The subsequent chromatic stretto produced as if by the centrifugal force of the

inganno technique pushes the harmony towards the sharp side, with the full chromatic tetrachord heard in the top voice in measures 46–48. The major tonic harmony on the first beat of measure 48 followed by the subdominant chord on the second beat appears to be the preparation for a cadence on the tonic. However, Strungk re-introduces the B \flat on the third beat of measure 48, giving the minor third even greater emphasis by way of the preceding ornamental gesture outlining the tritone E to B \flat . Linger on the B \flat for a dotted half-note, Strungk stops all motion in the other voices in order to bring this pitch into relief (measure 48). Measure 49 veers quickly toward the minor dominant with the resolution of the suspension in the alto to an F \sharp instead of the expected F \sharp ; Strungk then reiterates the B \flat in the soprano above the diminished triad, held for a quarter note, before the arrival on the dominant of D in the middle of measure 49. This flamboyant gesture extends the preceding chromatic descent beyond its usual limit in a depiction of even deeper sorrow, a move that also weakens the sense of harmonic order and expected closure that had been building contrapuntally in advance of this first important structural cadence.



Example 10 Strungk, *Ricercar*..., mm 51–52

After the first section Strungk abandons the inverted form of the subject: gone is the agonized leap upward of a minor seventh that had been so crucial to the emotion of the piece. In place of this melodic inversion, Strungk introduces a countersubject (Example 10) that is invertible at the octave with the subject and that lends to the *b* subphrase greater weight and motion. The entire section is much more firmly in the major, even while the B \flat persists as a vital constituent of the *b* subphrase as in the descending chromatic tetrachord in complete form in the alto (measures 67–69). Strungk draws attention to this figure here through his extraordinary harmonization, a sequence of unprepared seventh chords that threaten to tip downward. In this harmonic swoon, B major (as a dominant seventh) is touched on in measure 68, presaging the subsequent push to the cadence to that key—the major mediant of the *Ricercar* as a whole. With the F \sharp -major harmony in measures 94–95, over which the *b* subphrase descends to the cadence to B major, the *Ricercar* has journeyed to its farthest



Example 11 *Strungk, Ricercar...*, thematic material, mm 96–97

point on the sharp side. From this position, the opening is a distant, anguished memory.

The contrapuntal texture reaches maximum saturation in the final section (beginning at measure 96) with its dramatic interplay between harmony and affect, combinatorial research and the depiction of grief. From B major, Strungk returns directly to the tonic and the stately duple meter of the opening, but crowds his subject with not one, but two countersubjects (see Example 11). The entire section is an exploration of the myriad permutational riches of this three-voice matrix. The concentration on thematic elaboration, even within the heightened pathos of the *Ricercar*, seems to ease itself away from the relentless lament and the forays into the flat-side undertaken in the opening section and resulting from the way in which Strungk uses melodic inversion. Fueling these intimations of consolation is the dawning realization that the B \flat —the piece's harbinger of sorrow—is mostly absent after it appears once in the tenor in measure 97 in the full version of the theme in its new, temporally elongated guise. The B \flat is not heard again until measure 111, and when it does reappear after this fourteen-measure hiatus it is as the decisive pitch in the *b* subphrase of the subject in its home key. In the next measure (112) theme D sighs down from C to that crucial B \flat reiterating this modally ambiguous and affectively resonant pitch. In total Strungk introduces it five times in three measures (111–13), sending the harmony reeling towards F major—a lurch to the flat side reminiscent of the first section, and a realm not visited since the close of the second section in B major, a distant tri-tone away from F major. The pair of B \flat s coming in quick succession in the alto then the tenor in measure 158 seem headed to melancholic D minor with the mapping of the *b* subphrase onto the *a* subphrase. Measure 113 introduces a minor cadence to set up the move towards D minor, but the mode of this cadence is then negated by the bass entry of the subject with its prominent B \sharp in measure 114, steering the piece powerfully back to the major. This chromatic descent of the *b* subphrase in the soprano (upbeat to measure 115) is overlaid with the *a* subphrase in the bass artfully increasing the gravity of the arrival on the pedal point at D major.

The B \flat in the soprano in measure 118 again intimates the minor just before the final cadence to the tonic.

Strungk's insight into the combinatorial possibilities of his thematic material is both erudite and moving: compositional research intensifies emotion, intellect serves feeling. The superimposition of the two halves (subphrases *a* and *b*) beginning on the upbeat to measure 114 is a brilliant contrapuntal turn that adds drama to the arrival on the dominant pedal at the midpoint of the measure. With the bass holding to the just-arrived-at pedal point, the continuation of the theme—finally again without any temporal displacement—proceeds in the tenor with the upbeat to measure 115, a mournful descent elided with the sighing figure in the alto at the end of the measure. The results of Strungk's contrapuntal research—stretto, migration of voices, kaleidoscopic combination—are deployed virtuosically to heighten emotional effect.

The octave leap in the bass down to the low D in measure 116 increases the gravity of the texture and imbues the inevitable resolution to the tonic in measure 119 with meaning, even if one that is impossible to specify. Perhaps acceptance can be heard in this expectation that the tonic is imminent: the journey is now ready to conclude. Yet this ultimate coming to terms with loss—if that it was it is—does not mean that the mourning has been banished. With the final arrival on the tonic halfway through measure 119, Strungk weaves in the chromatic lament in the alto (measures 119–20). Then in measure 121 he brings in the subject first in the soprano, then, in the tenor in measure 122, both without the chromatic *b* subphrase and both entries confirming G major. By withholding the *b* subphrase in these two appearances of the subject, Strungk heightens our sense of expectation and anticipation. Indeed, when the chromatic figure comes in measure 123, Strungk introduces it as a culminating descent through the full tetrachord in the highest tessitura attained by the *Ricercar*, the preceding counterpoint having set the stage for this last dramatic outpouring of pathos. It is not only the range and its keening intensity, but also the figure's harmonic placement in the tonic that makes this passage so powerful: from Dido's Lament to the "Crucifixus" of the *B-minor Mass* the chromatic tetrachord is a hallmark of minor laments.

The ensuing descent passes through the highest E \flat (measure 124) on the keyboard, the first time in the entire piece the pitch has been heard. As a marker of G minor it inevitably presents a direct contrast to the E \sharp of the rectus subject presented most recently in the tenor entry in measure 122. This highest of lamenting utterances finally places the chromatic tetrachord in its home key, darkened the closing affect. The crucial nature of the pitch in the larger constel-

lation of sorrow and consolation is confirmed with the *saltus duriusculus* in the tenor over the bar line separating the last measures of the piece; the jagged leap up a diminished fourth reiterates the E \flat and forms a dissonance of a major seventh with the D in the soprano. Although no B \flat is heard at any point over the G pedal point that concludes the piece, the last three measures embrace G minor as if in a fateful surrender. The final sonority is a major triad, but it has the sound of a Picardy third: in the contest between the modes, the minor lament stages a heartfelt peroration. The echo of the impressive counterpoint crafted to serve the tragic affect of the piece recedes in a plaintive sonority of longing and grief.



Strungk's *Ricercar sopra la Morte* is a magisterial contribution to the north German tradition of commemorating death through learned procedures; yet the other funerary works in that tradition employ a pure counterpoint untroubled by the kind of ambiguity that marks Strungk's *Ricercar*. Tributes such as Buxtehude's *Mit Fried und Freud ich fahr dahin* were composed for erudite colleagues, family members, and fellow musicians, and were meant to transcend the sensuality of the body—and therefore the pain of earthly life—through pure thought on the page, and as weightless sound. In this disembodied music, the elegant motions of counterpoint and the procedures of inversion and invertibility allegorized the movement of the planets, and in their transfiguring consonance prefigured the heavenly concert in which the departed dedicatees were already participating. Like the learned works of Buxtehude and some of Strungk's other North German colleagues, the *Ricercar sopra la Morte* is clearly proud of its plethora of complex procedures; yet the combined effect of the musical discourse in Strungk's contrapuntal memorial to his mother is to evoke human sorrow and doubt. Strungk's *Ricercar* seems to combine mind and body, intellect and senses: the piece is complex and exacting, allowing one both to hear representations of heaven and be encouraged towards catharsis through the counterpoint itself.

Strungk's remarkable synthesis of intellect and feeling in a work in the learned style might be taken to mark an aesthetic shift away from viewing complex counterpoint as abstract contemplation, treating it instead as a mode of sensual expression. Traces of this change can perhaps be found in Walther's *Musicalisches Lexicon* of 1732, which singled out Strungk's *Ricercar sopra la Morte* for praise. Walther may even have had this piece in mind when he wrote

that counterpoint did indeed have the power to move the emotions: a *Fuga grave*, Walther tells his reader, is “a serious [gravitatisch] fugue which consists of long-held note values and a slow beat,”²⁷ but it can have the power to move the emotions, under the rubric *Fuga pathetica*: “A *Fuga pathetica* is the same as a *Fuga grave*; but it must also be suited for expressing an exceptional affect, so that it can earn the name of passionate fugue, as they are otherwise called.”²⁸ The *Ricercar sopra la Morte* is just such a fugue, learned yet intent on moving the passions.

One might be tempted to read the heartfelt emotion (as opposed to the intellectual achievement) in Strungk’s *Ricercar* as fitting for a work dedicated to the composer’s mother. While the contrapuntal researches of Buxtehude and Bernhard memorialized musically erudite men, Strungk’s was a piece for a woman who, according to this view, would not have appreciated the piece’s complexity and craft. The seventeenth-century view of women had it that the female sex was weaker both physically and intellectually; somatically moist, these creatures were prone to tears and incapable of the kind of rational thought that produced persuasive musical compositions, never mind ones involving intricate contrapuntal workings.²⁹

With these pernicious clichés of seventeenth-century attitudes on gender in mind, we might return now to the Carpzov brothers and their poems for their deceased mother. What kind of “beautiful lessons” was Samuel Benedikt referring to in praise of his recently departed mother? Were these confined to life lessons, rather than contorted theological arguments? Or should we at least consider the possibility that she, too, could discuss theology with her husband and sons, even though she had been deprived the kind of university education the male Carpzovs enjoyed? These sorts of questions seem far less fanciful when we read Walther’s entry on the Strungk family in the *Musicalisches Lexicon*, where we are informed that Delphin was in charge of five organs in Braunschweig, “which he had looked after by his youngest son, his daughter, and two students.”³⁰ The “daughter” likely refers to Nicolaus Adam’s younger

²⁷ “Fuga grave [ital.] Fugue grave [gall.] Fuga gravis [lat.] eine gravitatische, aus lang-haltenden Noten, und langsamer *Mensur* bestehende Fuge.” Walther, *Musicalisches Lexicon*, 266.

²⁸ “Fuga pathetica [lat.] Fuge pathétique [gall.] eine pathetische Fuge, ist eben was Fuga grave; sie muß aber auch, einen absonderlich affect zu exprimiren geschickt sein, daß sie den Nahmen einer *Fugue passionée* (wie sie sonst auch genennet wird) verdiene.” Ibid, 267.

²⁹ Detlef Briesen, *Das gesunde Leben: Ernährung und Gesundheit seit dem 18. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt: Campus, 2010), 23.

³⁰ “die er durch seinen jüngsten Sohn, Tochter, und 2 Scholaren verwalten laßen.” Walther, *Musi-*

sister Anna Margareta (born in 1645), though the other sister, Clara Maria (born 1643) would likely have learned to play the organ also.³¹ How talented these women were and how skillfully trained by their famous father will never be known. But they were organists, and playing in church required more than basic keyboard skills. In short, they could certainly have appreciated, probably even played, the *Ricercar* their brother wrote on the death of their mother. Did he send them copies? One would hope so, since he made this intensely personal tribute accessible to the Dresden organist Emanuel Benisch and probably to others as well. In light of the fact that at least one woman in the Strungk family played the organ, might it be possible that Maria Stubenrauen had herself had more than simply a passing interest in the musical pursuits of her husband and her children? In its supremely artful manipulation of counterpoint this extraordinary *ricercar* offers a moving tribute to a beloved mother, while also recognizing in its very artifice her expertise and contributions to a clan of musicians from which only the male members could hope to pursue such a varied and geographically wide-ranging professional career as did Nicolaus Adam. In open score format that lays bare the intricate mechanics of lament, Strungk composed a tombeau of immense pathos and skill. If the *Ricercar sopra la Morte della mia carissima Madre Maria Stubenrauen* is a monument of contrapuntal erudition, it is even more profoundly one of filial affection.

calisches Lexicon, 583.

³¹ Linda Maria Koldau, *Frauen–Musik–Kultur: ein Handbuch zum deutschen Sprachgebiet der Frühen Neuzeit* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2005), 514.

APPENDIX

**Nicolaus Adam Strungk, *Ricercar Sopra la
Morte della mia carissima Madre Catharina
Stubenrauen Morsa a Brunsviga il 28 d'Augusto
ao. 1685 Venet: il 20. Decemb: 1685
(Yale University, LM 5056, pp. 212–19)***



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