

Response to Barbara Barry's "Quasi una fantasia"
Boston University, April 5, 2017, Alan Gosman

Thank you for your excellent talk. Your idea that the fugal first movement of Op. 130 is "quasi una fantasia" is very exciting to consider. Your thesis is so bold because we are largely trained to treat fugue and fantasy as antithetical to each other. This opposition has an interesting history and is more complicated than we might initially expect.¹

The first writer who strongly rejected the compatibility of fantasy and fugue was Johann Mattheson. In 1739, he wrote that pieces in the fantasia style should have "no theme and subject to be worked."² He continues, "and so those composers who work regular fugues in their fantasias or toccatas do not have the correct idea of the style in question, as there is nothing so opposed to [fantasy] as order and restraint."³ For him, the imagination that allows a fantasy to take flight from prescribed norms is incompatible with contrapuntal invention.

But what of these composers that Mattheson admonishes for working regular fugues into their fantasias. They are not simply ignorant of the defining characteristics of fantasias. Instead, they are operating under an older understanding of the meaning of fantasia. The term first appeared in 1558, in Zarlino's *Le istituzioni harmoniche*. He writes, 'But when a composer derives his subject as he composes the parts of a composition, that is, when he derives one voice from another and arrives at the subject as he composes the parts all together, then that fragment of it from which he derives the parts of the rest of the composition is called the subject. Musicians call this "composing by fantasy" (comporre di fantasia). It could as well be called

¹ I would like to thank René Rusch and Roman Ivanovich for sharing their ideas about fantasias and fugues with me and directing me towards some of the sources used for this response.

² Johann Mattheson, *Der vollkommene Capellmeister* (Hamburg, 1739). Part I, p. 88. Facs. Laaber: Laaber-Verlag, 1980. Referenced in Peter Schleuning, *The Fantasia I: 16th to 18th Centuries*, translated by A. C. Howie (Arno Volk Verlag, Cologne, 1971), p. 15.

³ Ibid.

“counterpointing,” or making counterpoint, as one chooses.’⁴ Descriptions of fantasias by Morley, Praetorius, Mersenne, and Kircher, all followed Zarlino’s lead and provided imitative contrapuntal forms as examples of fantasias.

While Mattheson documents a change in the role of learned counterpoint with the fantasy frame in the mid-eighteenth century, in many basic respects, the descriptions of fantasy by Mattheson and those that preceded him were constant. For them all, fantasy is tied to freedom, imagination, and an avoidance of the norm.

Interestingly, around the time that Mattheson argues that fantasias should not include fugue, a new relationship between fantasy and fugue becomes common between them—that is, fantasias as a movement preceding a fugue, as in Bach’s *Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue*. And a few decades after Mattheson, the fantasy became more common as the opening movement to a sonata or set of variations, as in Mozart’s *Fantasia in C minor* K. 475, published with his sonata K. 457, and Beethoven’s *Choral Fantasy*, Op. 80, respectively.

One consequence of distancing fantasias from their contrapuntal origins was that imitative writing was no longer the norm in fantasias. Paradoxically, the general avoidance of imitative writing and fugues in fantasias opened up the possibility for contrapuntal passages to once again be a vital part of the fantasy style, as Barbara Barry has suggested today. For if fugues are not part of the fantasia norm, and fantasias strive to avoid the norm, then fugues become newly able to demonstrate a composer’s imagination and the compositional freedom that is a requirement for fantasias.

⁴ Gioseffo Zarlino. *Le Istitutione harmoniche* (Venice: 1558; repr., New York: Broude Bros., 1965), 172, trans. Guy A. Marco and Claude V. Palisca as *The Art of Counterpoint: Part Three of Le Istitutioni harmoniche 1558* (Norton Library Paperback Series. New York: Norton, 1976), 52–53.

A movement from Haydn's last set of string quartets, Op. 76, demonstrates the role that fugue can play within a fantasia, some 50 years after Mattheson disparaged this inclusion. The second movement of Josef Haydn's String Quartet in Eb major, Op. 76, No. 6 is marked *Fantasia*. It starts with an eight-bar period that begins and ends in B minor as shown in Example 1.

Example 1: Haydn, String Quartet in Eb major, Op. 76, No. 6, II, measures 1-8

Fantasia
Adagio

The musical score is presented in two systems. The first system contains measures 1 through 4, and the second system contains measures 5 through 8. Each system consists of four staves: Violin I (top), Violin II, Viola, and Cello/Double Bass (bottom). The time signature is 3/4, and the key signature is B minor (one flat). The tempo is marked 'Adagio'. The dynamic is marked 'p' (piano) at the beginning of each system. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and dynamic markings.

Its symmetrical structure and predictable end makes this an inauspicious beginning for a fantasia. But having established the proper consequent phrase ending for the theme, Haydn

repeats the theme several times with the most unexpected of modulations. The theme next modulates from B major to C# minor, then E major to G major, then G major to Bb major (hardly a key we expect to appear in a B major movement) before returning to B major. The same theme follows in Ab major. With this unusual experimentation of key, Haydn has clearly satisfied the inventiveness required for a fantasia, but perhaps the most surprising compositional feature of the movement remains. Following a return to B major and the familiar return of the antecedent phrase from the movement's opening, the consequent phrase unexpectedly veers off into a fugue as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Haydn, String Quartet in Eb major, Op. 76, No. 6, II, measures 60–72

The image displays a musical score for measures 60-72 of the second movement of Haydn's String Quartet in Eb major, Op. 76, No. 6. The score is written for four staves: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello/Double Bass. The key signature is Eb major (three flats) and the time signature is 3/4. The music begins at measure 60 with a dynamic marking of *p* (piano). The first two staves (Violin I and Violin II) feature a melodic line with a fermata over the first measure. The Viola and Cello/Double Bass staves provide harmonic support. The dynamic marking changes to *poco f* (poco forte) in measure 61. The music continues through measure 67, where the dynamic remains *poco f*. The score shows a complex interplay of melodic lines and harmonic textures, characteristic of Haydn's style.

The fugue is at least as unexpected as the key modulations that precede it. For this reason, it is the perfect addition to Haydn's *Fantasia* movement. The imitative techniques that marked the earliest fantasias, after largely disappearing over several decades, reassert their potential role in a fantasia's creative path.

As Barbara Barry points out, Beethoven "reinterprets how fugues can be written." And some of his compositional freedom may have stem from a renewed interest in the compatibility of the fantasia style with the fugue.