

Tsippi Fleischer

**Education to Humanity
Through the Chorals of Bach
(Harmony Studies for Professionals)**

1973

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(Harmony Studies for professionals)

I. Introduction

This project deals with the subject of Harmony taught to professionals. The aim is to impose on them (in spite of their professional tendencies) educational aspects in order to remind them that they are still human beings and not only musicians. It's quite a “secret”¹ matter between the teacher and himself, the teacher or lecturer who first of all believes in this truth. You will never be able to sign it as a subject of a lesson or a couple of lessons² on the blackboard, or declare about it suddenly in front of a class; it will never have its “physical” beginning or end, but it will always (all over the year) occur and “gush out” through dealing with Bach's chorals, in any sort of treatment (analysis, harmonizing, etc.).

Maybe this project seems quite imaginary – but even if those who look at it this way are not persuaded that this whole idea can be translated into more practical terms – why should I not try to share with people my imaginary world, which for me has already turned into a daily simple reality?...

II. What does it mean?

After the “legend” or “dream” of integrative class finished, and I was still left with my blank sheet of paper, I was looking for somebody to talk to about my project. I found one of my girlfriends who does not have any organized music education, just a human being³; I introduced my point (as written in the heading to this paper) and she started asking her questions.

This conversation helped me a lot in explaining my ideas and getting more and more focused on my thoughts.

The following pages are a true report of our dialogue.

Question: Why Bach's chorals and not Beethoven's Fifth, for example?

My answer: No doubt, one of the reasons of reaching such an idea is my own experience in teaching. It is easier to learn something from pieces of little form, as “Lieder”, Sonatas, or in our case a Choral. They are quite short and the content is a complete one, but actually it is put in a very concise way. The chorals are only an example, but a very efficient one, to this sort of literature. It does not mean that you cannot find all this richness somewhere else, and lean on that

1 I know the weariness of cantillation signs, but I cannot help it; - giving these up will mean taking out the whole spirit, and in this project I believe that it is impossible to depart from my personal mood of introducing it.

2 Lesson and not Lecture since Harmony studies relate to teaching skills (like a language) rather than a frontal lecture.

3 Except I know that she goes very rarely to symphonic concerts or listens sometimes to records of classical music.

as a basis for the same aims, but 'technically' it is much easier to see the whole picture through a short piece.

As to Harmony – in spite of its shortness, every Bach's choral is a whole world – an essence to harmonic content which could be the basis for a whole piece of any size. This whole world reflects all meanings of development, excitement, the conscious or unconscious creation of tension and its getting to a solution, an unobvious condition and its getting to a clearer and a more relaxed point, hesitation, keeping a secret intentionally, colors of different qualities and even slight darkness. All this is included in two lines of notes, along a few musical phrases.

Q: Isn't a choral built on a subject and its development?

A: No. A choral is built on harmony progression; let us say, when you listen to it you will hear one row of chords, while the melody is hardly recognized as the highest line. The rhythm is very static⁴.

If we take the chorals as the basis for understanding the whole role of “Tertian Harmony” – we should remember that Harmony is only one of the elements on which a piece of music is built. Besides Harmony there are – Melody, Rhythm, Orchestration, Form, etc.

Bach's chorals in their narrow texture contain a whole world, but this world is still expressed only by progressions of Harmonies.

Q: Do the chorals relate to one another? Is the book of Bach's chorals one piece of music or are they taken from different pieces and put together into one book?

A: The chorals are taken from different religious pieces. As usual, a choral is the highlight of almost every piece it is a part of – a “Mass”, a “Cantata”, a “Passion”. This is also the image of chorals that were included later in Beethoven's or Brahms's symphonies. It is generally performed by a chorus (accompanied by the orchestra).

Q: So what is the basic definition of a choral (intending Bach's chorals)?

A: A musical “piece” which is a part of a religious work, written for four choir voices (soprano, alto, tenor, bass) on a religious text⁵ (Christian).

Q: Now I understand less, I even don't understand at all, what does it mean “Education to Humanity through the chorals”?

A: I want to bring the student to an active state, so when he reads a choral, he will struggle by himself and wonder about all the aesthetical-psychological problems. I would like

⁴ The explanation is not too detailed on purpose.

⁵ The whole work is based on lines taken from the New Testament.

him to “breathe” and instill the problem of such a case as a choral (writing – actually harmonizing) as deeply as possible; then it will not differ from any other problem in life you overcome: it always involves a process filled with experience.

Here you have to be careful, there you are afraid, here you intentionally hide something, and you hesitate, here some tension is growing and increasing – there you create such tension and then try to solve it.

Q: How do others teach this same subject of chorals?

A: The criticized ones (by me) take a choral as a boring technical exercise in Harmony. The less criticized among those teachers at least make their pupils eternalize this music by singing. But all these are very superficial approaches, in better cases the students have eternalized the acoustic sounds correctly, but they never get some ideal⁶-emotional-psychological perspective.

III. Examples

I have chosen two chorals from Volume I (371 Four-part Chorals by J.S. Bach). I will analyze them exactly as I do it in class. This analysis could be done only with graduate students who have already been harmonizing chorals for a while in Bach's style.




The method of analysis:

- a) Ductus and key problems. Lots of problems, let us say almost all the basic problems arise already from looking at the Soprano itself (without having any idea about the way Bach treated it by 4 parts).
- b) General Harmonic structure – cadences. From this moment on we consider every cadence as a finishing of a Harmonic phrase, written in some tonality, built according to Tertian Harmony rules, with its own independent life.
- c) Detailed Harmony research – analysis of each of the phrases as a whole tonal work.
- d) General comments and summary.







6 An adj. of idea

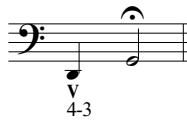

Choral No. 10: “Aus tiefer noch schrei ich zu dir”

(a) Ductus and Key Problems (Only the Soprano Melody)

The Diapason is stretched almost between  and the tonal center seems to be ; the dominant is . That's from looking only at the Soprano melody as an exercise for harmonizing. The tonality is anyhow minor-modal without a leading tone; such a “scale” seems to cause quite a few problems during the work of harmonization. The tonal centers (again, only from the “Soprano aspect”) are shifting all the time (B, E, A, G...) and this already creates some sort of non-relaxation.

(b) General Harmonic Structure (Cadences)


- (1) First one : A Dominant Rest 
- (2) Second : A Dominant Rest 
- (3) An Authentic (regular) Cadence  

- (4) An Authentic (regular) Cadence 
- (5) A Dominant Rest 

The choral starts and finishes (first and last phrases) by Dominant Rests (actually same ones: Am → E) – which stresses again the uncertainty of beginning and end. The reality of the Soprano “given” melody which is entirely modal with very typical ductus directions and formulas, and the need to solve every phrase by means of Tertian Harmony system (rules actually coming out as a result of acoustics) – this fact is obviously leading to some consequential conflict during the process of harmonization.

How does Bach treat this modal ductus which lacks all the time the consistent feeling of clear Dominant (with the Leading-Tone)? We have already seen the variety of tonalities, represented in cadences; even then the tension is very big – you can hardly find here some regularity of Tonic in the cadences – first one, as well as the last one, are on the Dominant!

(c) Detailed Harmony Research




(1) 

“Independent Tonality – A minor”

Chords	→	V ^{#4} ₂	I ₆	VII ^{#6}	I	VII ^{♮6}	III	VII ₆	V _#
Functions	→	D	T	D	T	T	I-#6	D	

A “Harmonic Introduction” starts on the Dominant!

This is the main content of the phrase!

The VII₆ – III are a slight hint of the modal mood.  gives the tonality (as a complete understandable “field”) of A minor, but  gives this triad  which may be considered as G or Em after completing the third note. The harmonization of this phrase is almost A minor – with the dominant at its beginning and at its end; this gives already a feeling of some “Opened Harmony” (see “Opened Form”) with no obvious statement of the Tonic; the VII (mainly) and III (modal because of the G in the melody) adds to this uncertainty.

(2) Again – general tonality – Am

The structure is quite the same: points to Am, but not so obviously, because the E is missing from the melody; can be considered again as or . The modal area enlarges (VII, III, VI, III !), only the first and last chords are certainly the major dominant of the key Am, with the leading tone G#.

Our mind gets more and more mixed up⁷ with the feeling of two Am keys – modal (natural) and harmonic. We could look at this phrase as belonging to two ‘difficult keys’, but without the need of talking about modulation – the two are so much “mixed up” with each other.

(3)

The doubling of notes with two chords gives for a moment the feeling of G. It is even quite “sure” that we have reached the key of G major – this feeling is quite strong. The doubling of the notes C and G gives a stress of the fourth and first notes of G major; when we read this place we really get to some psychological hesitation: May be this phrase is going to end in this way:

Of course, that's not the explanation, because the phrase still finishes differently, but that special place with the marked doublings “could turn the whole curve” to the other direction. Bach “decides” immediately (after that uncertainty) to stay at

⁷ The lines under some sentences or phrases are in those places that my aim in this project arises prominently.

his “safe home”, in Am key – when he harmonizes afterwards with the doubling of the note A and turning immediately the F# to F \sharp (IV \flat).



(4)

I Am V \flat IV I \flat IV I \flat ₄ V \flat ₄₋₃ I G

G VI

At last we have reached the key of G. We feel then quite “safe” and relaxed, because of all the allusions before. The minor dominant is the best place for explaining the modulation. Yet, the doubling of the note of E in that chord means that the existence of the new key is still not quite sure; it is proven finally by getting to the G major tonic after an authentic full cadence (IV \rightarrow I \flat ₄ \rightarrow V 8-7 \rightarrow I).

(5)

G IV \flat I V VI III VII \flat IV \flat ₄ I \flat ₄ I V \sharp

Am III


The key of G is concerned as the Dominant of the C which is the natural minor parallel to Am key. In the second chord the A is doubled, so it still could be considered as belonging to Am. Again a moment of vagueness; it clarifies in the next two chords of E (major dominant) and the F = VI with the doubling of the triad (A) which is the Tonic of the key:



Still the point of the Subdominant (or minorization) was never estimated through this choral. That's the explanation of the Gm chord (first inversion): minorization of the seventh in order to put in some of this special color and rebalance the three functions of the tonality. In any case, the perpetuum-mobile of shifting between the Tonic (which is kept in mind almost all the time) and the Dominant (signed always at the endings of phrases) is the most effective Harmonic movement.

(d) General Comments and Summary

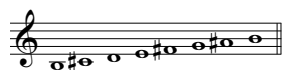


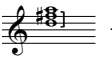

This choral is a continuity of tension. No way of explaining during the whole of it what a definite key it represents. The relative constancy of the Dominant (E) points to the key of a harmonic minor; but there is only one phrase where you feel this type of relaxation by getting to the tonic Am (the third one), and till the ductus is that modal one with the

diapason  (might be considered as hypo-aeolian). The conflict between the needs and nature of such a Melody and the orbit of Tertian Harmony is never solved. There is no chance for some sudden crash or surprise, no chance for a line of climbing to a certain point of climax. The “inner struggle” does not give any open way to such possibilities; it carries on with no way of getting calmed down as well, till its last moment.

Choral No. 62: “Wer nur den lieben Gott lässt walten”



(a) Ductus and Key Problems

The tonality is quite obvious: B harmonic minor: ; In the first phrase it opens and finishes on the Dominant, but the feeling of the Tonic is very basic. The closing of the second phrase points to the Tonic (Bm) very obviously. The interval of the triad  takes place in the third phrase. That could get its meaning as  or  – the “door” is opened for both possibilities. At last we have got to the clear abbreviation of the fifth  which definitely sums up the tonal quality of B harmonic minor.

(b) General Harmonic Structure (Cadences):

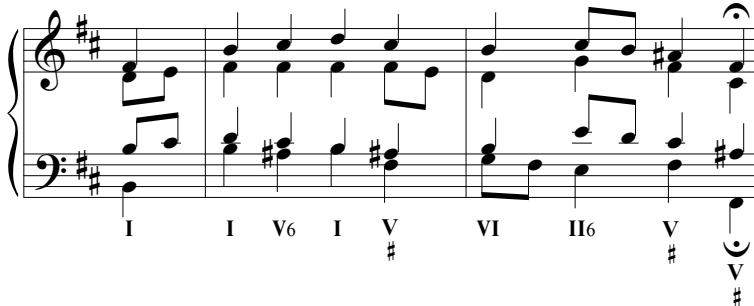
- (1) Harmonic Dominant Rest of Bm scale.
- (2) An Authentic Cadence with the Leading Tone on the Tonic of Bm.
- (3) An Authentic Cadence on the Tonic of D = parallel major.
- (4) Returning to Bm and again a full authentic cadence on the Bm Tonic (Leading Tone in the Tenor; the last chord – the Piccardian Triad).

The whole harmonic movement is completely a Classical one, which could serve as an example for the Harmonic system all over the music of Baroque and Classics:

- (i) The relations between Tonic – Dominant (while opening is on the Dominant and the clarifying of the Tonic comes afterwards).
- (ii) The deviation to the Parallel Major.
- (iii) The return to the Tonic.

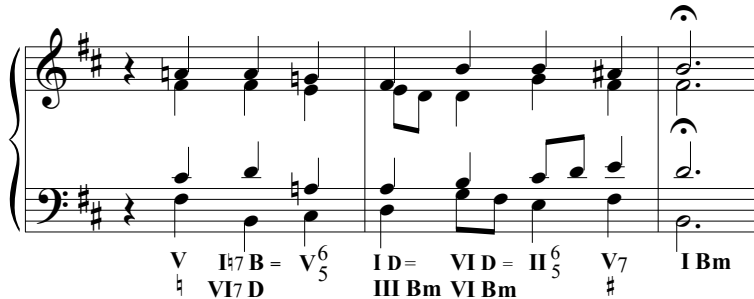
This Harmonic structure is the basis for every Invention and Fugue by Bach, or every Classical Sonata-Allegro movement (and this Sonata-Allegro form is the basis for Concertos, Symphonies, etc.).

(c) Detailed Harmony Research

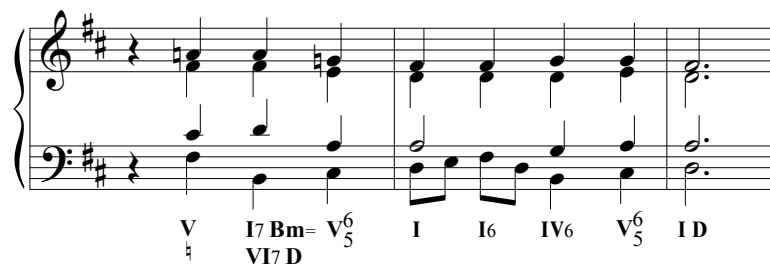
(1) 

This is quite a regular phrase moving from the Tonic to the Dominant in the Tonal key Bm (harmonic). The doubling of B in the sixth grade only emphasizes the feeling of the tonal center.




(2) 

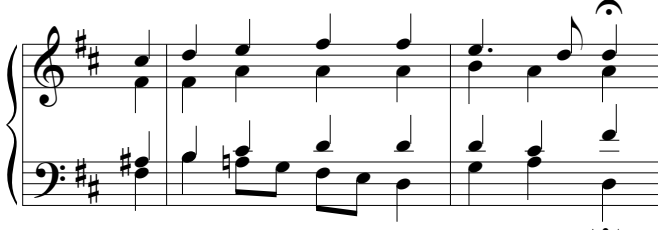
The most interesting phrase in this choral due to modal deviation; the minorization (A \flat , G \flat) turn the whole area to the D major key. The phrase “could end” entirely differently – for example:



I have invented this possibility, of course; it could not happen because of the Soprano line; but still when we are in the chord of Bm7 we feel like “caught in a trap” of secrets. We eventually don't know where we are going; the sound is very natural, and very irregular in terms of Bach's chords. We rarely find a harmonization by 7th chords.


Bach is still in dilemma, he does not want yet to give too obvious signs about the Bm key, in which he already knows that he has to complete this phrase. We feel quite a “sharp freshness” by having the momentary Tonic of D major – it is really astonishing! We are “handed back” to the Bm key, still quite gradually by the chord  that turns the B to serve again as a tonal center (doubled triad of the sixth). From then on, the feeling of the main key is very basic.

At last we should mention that it was only “a game of shifting shades and colors” on the basic ground of Bm key. There was no modulation to the parallel major.

(3) 

V I= V I₆ I II₅⁶ V I⁶_D
 # Bm VI D

Finally, there comes the expected four-alluded modulation to D major. The new key is proven through almost the entire phrase. We feel relaxed.

(4) 

I D VII#₆ I II₆⁵ IV₆ I₄⁶ V₈₋₇ I_#
 III Bm #

The way back to Bm key is quite simple and again very expected. The Tonic Center is felt very strongly all through the phrase.

(d) General Comments and Summary

Almost everything has already been said. This choral is a perfect example for the complete balanced atmosphere that a high-topic piece of Western music could create. The whole role of Harmonic angles and directions was explained before.

IV. Conclusions

Is it possible to educate to humanity? We are born as human beings and cannot deny it.

Still, without paying too much attention to it, I found myself one day in a philosophical trance while analyzing Bach's chords – it happened again and again, in many occasions of solving some of the “musical problems” with my students; those were not lectures given as a summary of a lesson, or “a truth of life” given theoretically by a prophet. The nuances

of thoughts or feelings were thrown to the earth very spontaneously as part of the whole atmosphere. Straightness and simplicity were above all.

Then I started believing I could still do it! I could still direct people to such aims, people that I never planned to train them to pass such ways through our joint (shared) stay, which meant professional music (Harmony) learning process. Then I remembered the aspects (we talked about in courses)⁸ in the study of music which may help people through music, and they strongly correlate with one another:

- (1) Concepts
- (2) Skills (habits)
- (3) Repertoires

Concepts are also here the most effective advantages, taken through/by such a secret project (correlated with professional technical skills and human habits); these are pointed at, not in an organized curriculum but captured in mind during the entire year; every now and then there are moments of getting to that high point of “identifying” with Bach in the process of creation and pulling some energy in order to experience sensitively all human emotions, movements, thoughts, feelings he was involved in. It is a great privilege to have such moments, even once in a few weeks (and an experienced mentor will always remind himself about this special project...).

These “little drops watering into your blood” bailing in your unconscious, float one day upwards and unite into a whole special quality of actual human values.

⁸ We shouldn't forget that this way of dropping points without any order (but with the direction of a teacher) and collecting them afterwards into a whole mass of information, is a certain method of teaching used and recommended by my teachers from NYU, and I realize that it is a perfect one!

Approval

Zipporah Fleischer; Education to Humanity through the Chorals of Bach

Your project has been worked out on so many levels that both of us were thrilled when we received it. You have demonstrated intelligence and judgment in your presentation. We might point out that, as you explore the functions within the phrases of the chorals, you should also extrapolate and examine the function of the chorale itself in the context in which it appeared. The function may be for aesthetic (inherent in the design of the music) reason and for non-aesthetic reasons (textual and other extra-musical considerations). An examination of the role of the chorale in the larger works can serve to give greater perspective and insight into the harmonic function of the chorale. You have done an excellent job of treating the chorale in detail --- and in building a rationale that supports your approach. Our greatest concern is that you don't spread yourself so thin that you can't continue to produce with such quality as your graduate study continues. As you may well imagine, the doctorate will demand much more of you in terms of thoroughness and scholarship (documentation). We have entered an Incomplete-Phasing for the 2-point course that you were unable to participate in completely. We will work out the details of completing the requirements when you come to New York. One of the highlights of our visit was to see you in your "other role" as an arranger-performer --- but we are placing our bets in you as one of the real future guiding forces in the music education scene once you have completed your doctorate! Our very best wishes to you, and we look forward to the time when you will be here in New York. Shalom!

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Signature

See the original letter of approval (New York University, 1973) in the next page

Zipporah Fleischer: Education to Humanity through the Chorales
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