

# Webern's Orchestration of Bach's "Ricercar a 6": An Analysis in Orchestral Color

In 1935, Anton Webern produced a version of J.S. Bach's "Ricercar a 6" from *The Musical Offering*, writing it for small orchestra. In this paper, I attempt to demonstrate how Webern's orchestration<sup>1</sup> offers an analytical perspective into the structure of the original work by Bach, through reconfiguring various structural components within the piece.

In a letter written by Webern to Hermann Scherchen, he states:

My orchestration tries (here I am speaking of the whole work) merely to reveal the motivic coherence. [...] The ultimate object of my bold undertaking was to make it available at last by trying to show in my arrangement my view of the work.

In this quote, Webern explicitly states that his approach to orchestrating Bach's work is based upon his objective of revealing underlying motivic connections that run throughout the piece, and indeed, to create an analytical product representing his views of the work.

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper, I will be referring to the Universal Edition of the score published in 1935.

Webern's orchestration seems to present a coherent picture of the structure of the piece through foregrounding various relationships. On a larger level, broader sectional demarcations may also be seen through the treatment of texture, as well as the use of specific instrumental timbres or techniques as structural markers, revealing large structural points within the piece. Moreover, the way he breaks up melodic lines across various timbral combinations may be seen as a demarcation of musical phrases. Webern also uses the *klangfarbenmelodie* approach, that is, he breaks up a single melody line into many segments, each colored by a different instrumental timbre. His methodical approach to segmentation of this sort highlights motivic connections throughout the entire fugue, even across seemingly different musical themes. At the same time, the use of certain specific orchestrational techniques also reveals certain latent characteristics of the fugue subject, including the significance of the pitch E $\flat$ , the fundamental line of the melody, as well as its rhythmic character, and draws out the connections between these characteristics to other parts of the piece. At the same time, Webern's highly fragmented approach also seems to somewhat obscure the distinction between the six voices in the original fugue. His orchestration thus reconfigures Bach's piece in a certain way, yet also draws attention to other less salient aspects and relationships within the piece.

The first part of this paper will discuss how Webern's orchestration of the piece reveals a perspective on its structure, through the use of various orchestrational strategies. The second part of the paper will explore Webern's treatment of the fugue subject, as well as how he reveals certain relations between its latent characteristics to the other parts of the piece.

## 1. Structural Divisions Through Orchestration

### 1.1 Demarcation of Phrases by Instrumental Combinations

Webern clearly demarcates phrasal divisions, especially in the exposition, by using groups of usually two or three different instruments. In measures 1 to 8, the subject is split up amongst the muted trombone, muted horn, and muted trumpet. When the answer enters in measures 9 to 16, there is a clear shift to the flute, clarinet, and oboe combination, while the countersubject is split up between the muted second violins (using both arco and pizzicato techniques) and a muted solo viola. The answer and the countersubject are thus clearly set apart by the difference in woodwind and string timbral colors. Despite the highly fragmented *klangfarbenmelodie* approach to the orchestration, clear larger combinations may be seen across phrases, or even across voices, as in the case of measures 9 to 16.

The piece starts out with clear distinctions between the instrumental families (brasses, woodwinds, and strings), as described above. As the piece unfolds, Webern starts to use instrumental combinations for each phrase across the different instrumental families. In measures 17 to 24, for instance, the subject is played by the bass clarinet, muted trombone, and bassoon, a mix of woodwinds and brass, but the countersubject is still distributed across the strings (muted violas, solo violin arco and pizzicato). There is still a clear divide between winds and strings in these two voices, but the free counterpoint line in the third voice of Bach's fugue is shared by a mix of muted horn and string instruments (muted solo cello, second violins arco

and pizzicato). The mixture of instrumental combinations across different instrumental families could well be due to range considerations, but the general tendency towards having the wind timbres predominate the subject line and the string timbres representing the countersubject whenever it appears can be seen, not just in the exposition, but throughout the entire piece<sup>2</sup>.

## 1.2 Demarcation of Sections

Prior to starting a discussion concerning Webern's demarcation of sections through orchestrational means, it is fruitful to examine the various large sectional divisions that are implied through the harmonic structure of the original Bach fugue.

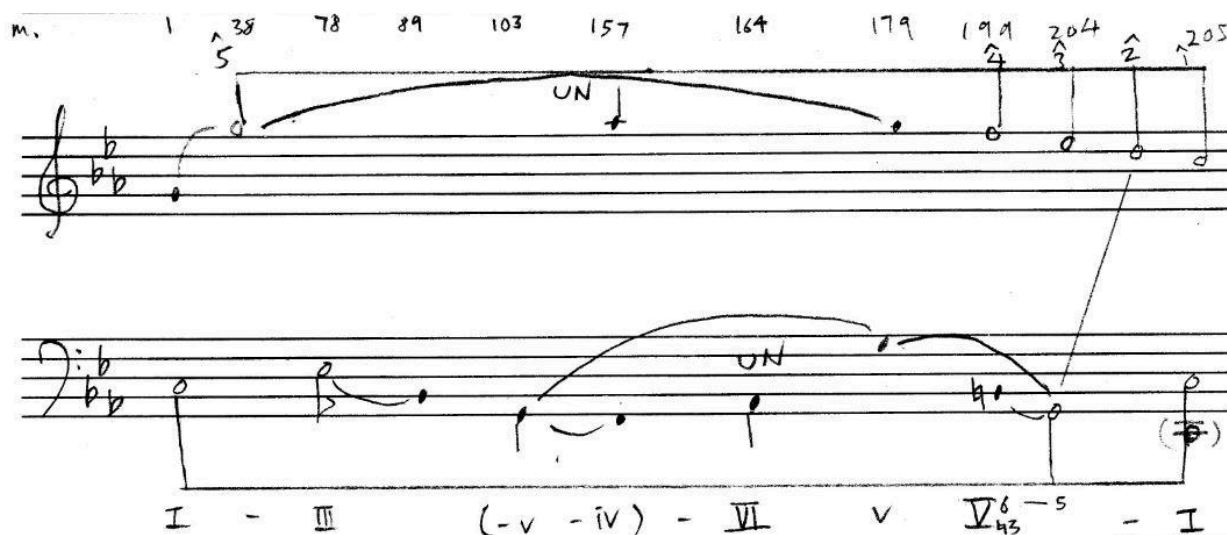


Fig. 1: Schenkerian middleground graph of Bach's "Ricercar a 6"

<sup>2</sup> The exact breakdown of instrumental combinations within each subject/answer entry is shown in Fig. 4.

From this sketch, it may be seen that the cadence on the mediant in measure 78 is significant on a structural level, as it represents an overall mediant arpeggiation towards the dominant. The next significant point occurs in measure 103, where there is a cadence on the minor dominant, preparing the underlying structural dominant. In measure 164, there is another significant cadence on the submediant, which is an upper neighbor to the dominant, before the return to the dominant in measure 179, in preparation for the final grand cadence in measures 204 to 205. The rest of this section of the paper will deal with how Webern reveals this larger harmonic structure through various orchestrational means.

Webern uses specific instrumental timbres for specific purposes, such as to highlight specific motifs (this will be discussed in further detail within section 2.3 of the paper), or as important structural markers, drawing attention to certain articulatory moments within the piece. The timpani, for instance, plays a significant role as a structural marker. A study of all instances of the timpani's appearances indicates cadential points, particularly associated with major structural points of the piece, specific appearances of the subject, a new theme, or an episode.

Measure Numbers	Harmonic Function	Structural Significance
35-36	V	Leading back from a two-measure bridge to the next subject entry.
43	V	Preceding cadence entering 4-measure bridge, emphasizes the V-I harmonic motion that is concealed by moving melodic lines.

48-50	V	Connecting the end of the 4-measure bridge to the final entry of the answer in the exposition.
76-78	V-I/III	Doubles the bassline for the large cadence on III (E ♭ major) at this first important large structural point, ushers in an episode with a new theme. Webern also strengthens this cadence through a “molto rit.” tempo instruction prior to the cadence, and this is the first drastic tempo change that is indicated within his orchestrated version.
88-89	V/V/III	Follows through the perfect authentic cadence, though only on the dominant pitch F (of B ♭ major); ushers in a new section in a new key, where the subject reappears a measure later after a “false entry” in the cellos and basses.
94-95	V	Signals a return to the tonic key of the piece, where there is again a “false entry in the cellos and basses before the entry of the subject in the tonic.
97-98	V/v	Prepares the dominant to emphasize the V-I cadence in G minor at the end of the subject (m. 103); mm. 97-102 may be seen as a prolongation of the dominant of G, and the timpani roll highlights the start of that prolongation.
102-103	V-I/v	Ushers in another episodic passage.

144-147	V/V/III	Dominant pedal in the bass voice, before and during the entry of the subject in B $\flat$ minor following a shift away from E $\flat$ major (in which the subject appears for the first and only time in the major mode in mm. 131-138).
178-179	V-I/v	Important cadential point ushering in a return to the dominant, and entering the final episodic passage following the penultimate appearance of in the subject in the dominant. Webern strengthens this entry into the dominant by indicating a sudden increase in tempo (“wieder sehr fließend”) on m. 57, as well as with the first violins and violas doing pizzicato chords on both the V and the I of G minor (this is the second instance in the piece where pizzicato chords appear in the strings part).
205 (final measure)	I	First appearance of the tonic in the timpani part - following the final and most significant cadence of the piece.

Fig. 2: Timpani entries

From the diagram above, it can be seen that the timpani fulfils a few important functions: 1) It signifies a moving away from or return to the subject to or from an episodic passage or bridge through rolling the dominant note, 2) It plays and prepares the dominant (of the new key) before entering a new key area, 3) it completes the cadential motion by playing both of the V-I notes at the largest divisive points, and 4) it strengthens the final cadence by saving the roll on

the tonic for the last note of the piece. In this way, the timbre of the timpani performs a specific role in highlighting certain significant points within the piece. It is also noteworthy that the timpani only highlights the cadential points associated with the tonic, mediant, and dominant key areas, again, revealing an emphasis on the tonic triad, which incidentally is a defining feature of the head motif of the subject as well.

Besides the timpani, the strings pizzicato chords also appear only three times at specific points within the piece. The chords are an addition to the original piece, which is fundamentally a contrapuntal network of single melodic lines without vertical chords, and the rarity of their appearances draws attention to the points at which they appear. The first appearance, on a G minor harmony (with a missing third) occurs in measure 57, which marks the end of the exposition. The second appearance occurs in measures 178 to 179, on the perfect authentic cadence entering the dominant of c minor that precedes the penultimate entry of the subject in the dominant. The final appearance of the strings pizzicato chords is in measure 197 in all the violin and viola parts, in a V-I motion within the tonic key c minor. This is the first and only time in the piece where the chords are played in full in a V-I motion, and not only on the harmonic arrival, and this a significant spot, as the final subject entry in the tonic appears. This moment is enhanced by the dramatic tempo change (from the extended "rit." in measures 193-196, to the emphatic "sehr getragen" indication in measure 197), as well as the octave doubling of the outer voices in the first violins and bass parts, opening up the register of the orchestration to its most extreme for the first time in the piece.



Related to the strings pizzicato chords is also the only appearance of a chord in the harp part within the final measure of the piece. Throughout the entire piece, the harp only plays single notes, which is rather atypical of conventional harp writing, and is used rather sparingly in general. Hence, the appearance of the C major chord in the harp part right in the final measure also makes a somewhat impactful statement.

Besides the use of specific instrumental timbres, Webern's orchestration also demonstrates differences in texture across different passages within this piece. In true Webernian fashion, the orchestration of the piece starts off very chamber-like -- sparse in texture, intimate, and extremely intricate -- and remains that way for most of the piece. However, there are also other passages within the piece which shift into a larger orchestral sound. For instance, from around measure 157 to the downbeat of measure 165, the full sound of the entire strings section playing *tutti* appears for the first time, in longer melodic lines. Prior to this passage, the orchestration is either highly fragmented in a *klangfarbenmelodie* fashion, or long melodic lines are taken only by solo instruments, particularly when they appear in the string parts, resulting in a more chamber-like texture, as opposed to the richer, sweeping orchestral sound in these measures. The bassline played by the cellos are also doubled an octave lower by the double basses (starting from measure 147), in full arco gestures. Though this is not the first time in the piece where the cello line has been doubled by the double basses, this doubling is especially important here as the strings section is foregrounded in full force. Furthermore, the horn and the trombone are also unmuted in this passage, and play long melodic lines, further enhancing the fullness of the orchestral sound.

Webern's treatment of this particular passage is significant as it leads to an important cadence on the submediant (A  $\flat$ ) in measure 164, a significant structural point of the piece as shown in Figure 1. Moreover, the harmonic rhythm of this passage is also quicker, with a change of harmony every measure, indicating a build-up towards the cadence on A  $\flat$ . Hence, it is reasonable to infer that Webern would give special weight to this passage through shifting from a chamber-like manner of orchestration to a larger orchestral sound.

The only other spot in which the full orchestral sound is heard is of course in measures 197-205, the final statement of the fugue subject in the tonic. In this final passage, the fugue subject in the bassline is not only not orchestrated in a fragmented manner for the first and only time, but is even played in unison by the bass clarinet, bassoon, cellos, and doubled by the basses an octave lower. The soprano voice is also played in octaves by the first violins, flute, oboe, and clarinet. Voice 2 is played by the muted trumpet, voice 3 by the second violins, violas, and English horn in unison, voice 4 by the muted horn and muted trombone one after the other, and voice 5 by the trombone, followed by the second violins, violas, and English horn in unison, and then followed by the unmuted horn. Such extensive doublings including doublings at the octave occur for the first time in the piece only at this point, bringing in an orchestral sound that is even fuller than in measures 157-165. The dramatic effect of finality is also achieved through the tempo indications of "sehr getragen" and "molto rit.," as well as the final timpani roll, as mentioned in Figure 2. Webern thus saves the sound of the full orchestra only for the most harmonically significant passages within the piece.

## 2. Examining Webern's Treatment of the Fugue Subject and Connections to the Rest of the Piece

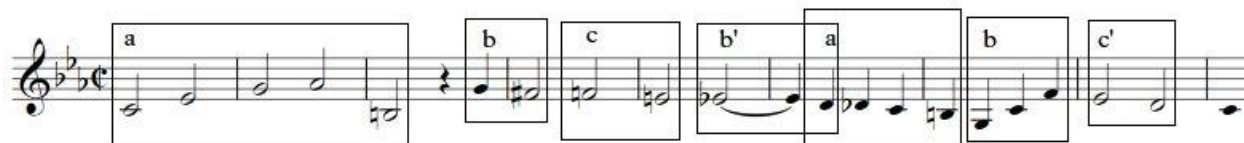


Fig. 3: Segmentation of fugue subject

In the original Bach work, the fugue subject appears twelve times in its entirety, and in every instance of its appearance except the last, Webern is consistent in his segmentation according to instrumental color. Regardless of timbral combination, Webern's segmentation of the subject always follows the a-b-c-b'-a-b-c' pattern, with b' representing a harp doubling (usually on a harmonic) on the first note of the group, and c' representing a harp doubling on both notes of the group. The consistency of Webern's segmentation of the subject is shown in the table below.

mm.	Voice in Original Fugue	Key	a	b	c
1-8	3	C minor	Muted Trombone	Muted Horn	Muted Trumpet
9-16	2	G minor	Flute	Clarinet	Oboe

		(answer)			
17-24	5	C minor	Bass Clarinet	Muted Trombone	Bassoon
25-32	4	G minor	English Horn	Horn (Unmuted)	Bass Clarinet
37-44	1	C minor	Muted Trumpet	Oboe	Clarinet
49-56	6	G minor	Bass Clarinet + Double Bass Pizzicato	Bassoon	Cellos
94-101	5	G minor	Bassoon	Bass Clarinet	Muted Trombone
115-122	3	F minor	Muted Trumpet	English Horn	Muted Horn
131-138	1	Eb major	Oboe	Flute	Muted Trumpet
145-152	4	Bb minor	Muted Horn	Muted Trombone	Muted Trumpet
171-178	2	G minor	Clarinet	Muted Trumpet	Muted Horn
197-205	6	C major	Bass Clarinet + Bassoon + Cellos + Double Basses	Bass Clarinet + Bassoon + Cellos + Double Basses	Bass Clarinet + Bassoon + Cellos + Double Basses

Fig. 4: Timbral combination within each full subject entry

Webern's letter to Hermann Scherchen provides an insight into how he conceives of the divisive units within the subject:

I feel this part of the theme, this chromatic progression from G to B, as essentially different in character from the first five notes [...] By the way from G to E flat there are also five notes, and, if you count the E flat twice (in the sense of a link!) in the intrinsic rendering of the theme, this first crotchet in bar 6 (the tied E flat in the horn and the simultaneous crotchet rest in the trombone) is heavily stressed as a dividing point, an end and a beginning (it is scored thus): so that if one counts this E flat twice one again has five notes, from E flat to B. So the form seems to me: five notes, then 4+1 and 1+4 which is twice five, and finally five notes again!

Referring back to Figure 4, it might be useful to understand the timbral overlap on the pitch D in measure 6 as helping to maintain the continuity of the line in order to show the five-note grouping of E ♭ -D-D ♭ -C-B, despite the motivic parsing into the two-note stepwise descending figure.

The adjoining of the second and third five-note groups is also shown through the highlighting of the E ♭ in measure 5 (what Webern calls the "link") by the harp harmonic. This highlighting of the E ♭ not only reveals the linking of the units five notes; it also draws attention to the fact that this E ♭ here functions as the axis of symmetry both in terms of its central location within the four groups of five notes, as well as in terms of pitch, as it is a pitch center between G and

B $\natural$ , both ends of the chromatic descending line. Moreover, E $\flat$  also carries structural importance as the mediant key, and the first major cadence of the piece is in E $\flat$ .

Even though Webern talks about the five-note grouping, he does not segment the subject orchestrally in that manner. Instead, he breaks it up into even smaller segments within that five-note grouping. The implications arising from this manner of segmentation can reveal various latent characteristics of the subject itself, or the relationship between different thematic material within the piece in the following ways: 1) it highlights of the fundamental line of the subject, 2) emphasizes the rhythmically syncopated character of the subject and superimposes that character on other parts of the piece through orchestrational means, and 3) reveals motivic connections between the different themes.

### 2.1 Revealing the Fundamental Line



Fig. 5: Fundamental line (*Urlinie*) of the fugue subject

With reference to both Figure 3 and Figure 5, it can be seen the Webern's manner of segmenting the fugue subject draws attention to its fundamental line. The  $\wedge 5$ - $\wedge 4$ - $\wedge 3$  descent is outlined by the timbral change, and the beginning and end of the prolongation of the  $\wedge 3$  is

signalled by the harp, which then continues the descent into  $\wedge^2$ . The return to  $\wedge^1$  is marked by the entry of a new timbral color. The dovetailing on the D in measure 6 ensures that this D is not emphasized in the same manner as a structural  $\wedge^2$ . Instead, the structural  $\wedge^2$  of the phrase is marked by the harp.

## 2.2 Rhythmic Implications

Webern's manner of segmentation creates a highly syncopated rhythmic effect, as the timbral changes on the weak beats produce accents which are not explicit in the original Bach fugue. Already, the subject carries with it a syncopated character, especially on Webern's view of the 5-5-5-5 grouping as being inherent within the subject -- each group of five notes starts on a weak beat, with the exception of the first group. In this way, Webern's highly fragmented manner of orchestration throughout the entire piece gives the piece a unique syncopated character that is not necessarily heard within the original fugue, but draws attention to rhythmic syncopation as perhaps being a latent characteristic of the piece. This hypothesis may be supported by the fact that many of the phrases within the original fugue do not begin on the downbeat. A particularly evident example would be the beginning of a whole new passage on the second half note of measure 78 after the grand cadence on the mediant. So, it may be argued that Webern is not simply imposing a different rhythmic character on the original piece, but rather, bringing out a characteristic that is already inherent within the piece, and taking it even further.

### 2.3 Motivic Connections

Webern's segmentation of the subject also draws attention to three different motifs, that is, what I name the "triad motif," the "descending seconds motif," and the "ascending fourths motif".

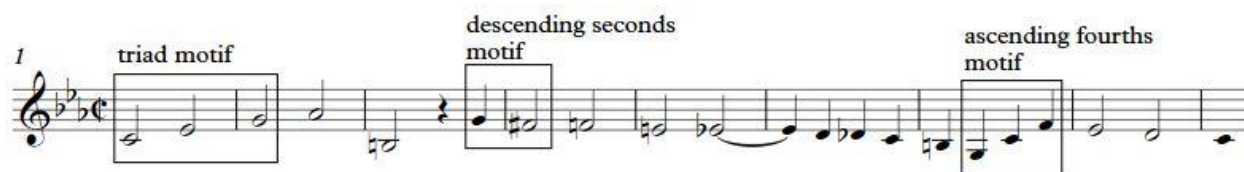


Fig. 6: Motifs derived from the fugue subject

If we think of the A $\flat$  and B $\natural$  from the first five notes as being harmonic elaborations of G and C respectively (as suggested by the sketch in Figure 5), then it makes sense to think of the main motivic content of the first five notes as being reduced to the triad motif as its basic element. Similarly, the chromatically descending line from G to B $\natural$  (the next two sets of five notes) may be reduced to the two-note cell, which I term the "descending seconds motif" in Figure 6. In the last group of five notes, the only new element is the G-C-F ascending fourths motif, before the descending seconds appear once more. And indeed, this interpretation of the reduction of the subject line to these three motivic elements is consistent with the way Webern has split up the subject through his orchestration (see Figure 3).

Examining some other examples of how Webern has broken up other melodic lines within the rest of the piece, it can be seen that there is a clear motivic idea with some clearly-defined



feature within each little segment of music. These smaller units of music usually feature: 1) triadic figures, 2) stepwise motion, either in a scalar manner, or as neighbor notes (or in an elaborated form of neighboring motion), or 3) leaps of fourths or fifths (intervals which are inversions of one another). It may be argued that these ideas are all derived from and related to the segmented units within the subject. Going back to Figure 5, the  $\hat{3}$  of the *Urlinie* (the E  $\flat$ ) is prolonged by a descending then ascending sort of melodic contour, that may be understood as being similar to an elaborated form of neighboring motion. By reducing melodic lines to smaller units, motivic affinities between melodic cells are made more apparent.

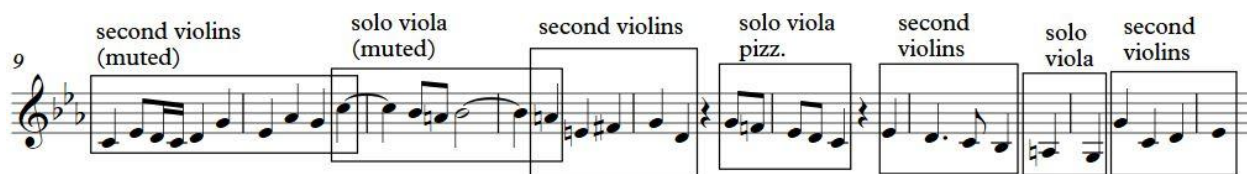


Fig. 7: Timbral segmentation of the countersubject (voice 3, mm. 9-17)

In section 2.2, I have already briefly discussed the rhythmic implications of Webern's *klangfarbenmelodie* approach to orchestrating this piece. From Figure 7 above, we can see that Webern has emphasized the syncopated aspect of the melodic line through having the timbral exchanges occur on the weak beats. This is especially apparent in the second half of the countersubject (starting from the pizzicati notes in the solo viola part), where there is no dovetailing at all, unlike in the first half. The alternation between the group timbre of the second violins as well as the solo viola creates enough of a contrast within the overall line colored by the strings timbre. Apart from creating an effect of rhythmic syncopation within the

line, Webern's method of segmentation also seems to parse motivic material into different units, each representing some particular characteristic. The first unit in measures 9 to 10 seems to feature the leap of the fourth, the second unit starting from the last quarter note of measure 10 to 12 appears to highlight the descending stepwise line (with a neighboring motion elaboration), the third unit again features the leap of the fourth (in the opposite direction), the fourth, fifth, and sixth units features descending stepwise motion (broken into distinct units to emphasize the syncopation), and the last unit features both the descending fifth as well as the ascending stepwise motion. These melodic characteristics all appear to be related to the three motifs derived from the subject of the fugue, that is, the triad motif, the descending seconds motif, and the ascending fourths motif. Webern's segmentation of long melodic lines into these smaller units thus make the motivic connections far more apparent.

It is also worth noting that Webern uses the timbres of the strings pizzicati and the harp (i.e. plucked strings) in highly specific ways. Earlier on, I have already discussed the role of the harp in signalling the beginning and the end of the prolongation of  $\Delta^3$  within the subject (in section 2.1), and touched on the sole use of the harp chord in the final measure (in section 1.2). Also, I have discussed how the specific use of the strings pizzicati chords draws attention to specific structural points within the piece. However, besides these functions, the timbre and gesture of the plucked strings also highlight the appearances of these three motivic elements in their various forms whenever they appear. Indeed, a thorough survey of all the instances in which string pizzicati (with the exception of the pizzicati chords) are used seems to point at melodic fragments in which either stepwise motion or the leap of a perfect fourth features strongly. The

harp, on the other hand, besides its important role within the subject, also seems to mostly highlight certain instances of stepwise motion or the triad motif, and on occasion, leaps of fourths or fifths.

The image displays two systems of musical notation for plucked string parts, likely harp, from measures 89 to 96. The first system (measures 89-92) shows a treble clef staff with a melodic line and a bass clef staff with a supporting line. The second system (measures 93-96) continues the same parts. Yellow highlighting is used to emphasize specific triad motifs: in measure 89, the bass clef staff has a triad of B-flat, D, and F; in measure 94, the bass clef staff has a triad of B-flat, D, and E-flat; and in measure 95, the treble clef staff has a triad of B-flat, D, and F. The key signature is two flats (B-flat major or D-flat minor).

Fig. 8: Plucked string parts (in yellow) from mm. 89 to 96, highlighting the triad motif

With reference to Figure 8 above, the first B  $\flat$ -D-F figure in the voice 6 part (in measures 89 to 90) is played by a solo cello and doubled by pizzicati notes played by a solo bass. All the other appearances of the triad motifs are played by the harp, in a doubling role to another instrument. Though the B  $\flat$ -D-E  $\flat$  figure in voice 4 of measures 94 to 95 does not form a triad, it runs in parallel motion a third above the head motif of the tonal answer of the fugue subject that starts on voice 5 in measure 95. Even though there is a canon on the melody that starts on voice 1 in measure 89, Webern's use of the bass pizzicati plus the harp doublings still announces

the presence of the triad motif, anchoring the motivic connection of this passage to the fugue subject, despite the introduction of (seemingly) new thematic material.

The musical score for Figure 9 shows the plucked string parts for measures 57-62. The instruments are Harp, Violin 2, Viola, and Double Bass. The key signature is two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and the time signature is 4/4. The score is written in a grand staff format with five staves. The Harp part is in the bass clef, Violin 2 is in the treble clef, Viola is in the bass clef, and Double Bass is in the bass clef. The music features a mix of whole and half notes, with some notes beamed together. Dynamics include *p*, *cresc.*, *pizz.*, *mp*, and *mf*. The Double Bass part starts with a *p* dynamic and includes a *cresc.* marking. The Viola part starts with a *pizz.* marking and includes a *p* dynamic. The Violin 2 part starts with a *p* dynamic and includes a *pizz.* marking. The Harp part starts with a *p* dynamic and includes a *cresc.* marking.

Fig. 9: Plucked string parts shown against original fugue, mm. 57-62

Figure 9 shows yet another example of how the plucked strings highlight stepwise motion within a seemingly new thematic passage. These instruments only double other instruments, punctuating only specific notes - the second violins and violas play only two-note cells showing descending stepwise motion on weak beats. The violas even cross voices, playing the first two-note cell taken from voice 3, then the next two-note cell taken from voice 2. The harp and double bass, on the other hand, highlight the stepwise motion of the lower two voices through doubling the bass clarinet and cello parts respectively. Since these lines are already assigned to

other instruments, the doubling function of the plucked strings should be seen as being significant, especially since only specific notes from the melodic lines are being doubled (in the case of the second violin and viola parts). Hence, it is reasonable to think that the plucked strings here serve a specific function in drawing attention to the stepwise figure, and especially to the descending seconds motif made explicit in the second violin and viola parts.

Fig. 10: Harp parts (in yellow) from mm. 78 to 85

Typically, the harp does not usually appear on its own within Webern's orchestration of this piece, and usually doubles another instrument for certain emphatic purposes. Its only solo appearance occurs in measures 80 to 85, as illustrated above in Figure 10, where it takes on melodic lines/fragments on its own for the first time. The rarity of this occurrence draws attention to its significance, especially in this passage after the large cadence on the mediant, that seems to usher in a new theme. Also, since Webern has so meticulously designed the harp part to fulfil certain specific functions (as shown in many previous examples), it would be unlikely that the choice to assign the melodic line to the harp here (as a solo line) is merely an arbitrary decision. Through the special appearance of the harp as a melodic voice (and not simply performing a doubling or punctuating function), the harp highlights the stepwise motion

of the voice 3 line from measure 80 to 85 in terms of both the musical surface level as well as on a larger phrasal level. The point-like articulation of the harp line sticks out at that point amidst all the other legato solo wind or string lines<sup>3</sup>, highlighting the neighboring note motion that occurs here.

Besides the role that the timbre of the plucked strings appear to play in highlighting the triad motif, the descending seconds motif, and the ascending fourths motif as well as their derivations, Webern also indicates strings glissandi on certain specific gestures, that is, where a descending fifth appears within a solo strings line.

The figure displays five musical staves illustrating glissandi on a falling fifth in solo string lines. The first staff, labeled 'm. 24 solo violin', shows a descending fifth (G4 to C4) with a *p* dynamic marking. The second staff, 'mm. 79-80 solo viola', shows a descending fifth (G3 to C3) with a *pp* dynamic marking and a glissando symbol. The third staff, 'mm. 81-82 solo cello', shows a descending fifth (G2 to C2) with a glissando symbol. The fourth staff, 'mm. 84-85 solo violin', shows a descending fifth (G4 to C4) with a glissando symbol. The fifth staff, 'mm. 98-99 solo violin', shows a descending fifth (G4 to C4) with a glissando symbol.

Fig. 11: Glissando on a falling fifth in the solo string lines

<sup>3</sup> Although the melody shown here in voice 3 proceeds mostly stepwise, Webern assigns only part of this line to the harp, leaving four notes in the middle (also moving in stepwise motion) to the oboe. This could well be due to a purely orchestrational reason, that is, that the harp notes would not sustain well on the long notes and are thus used only in the more rhythmically active parts of the phrase.

The falling fifths illustrated above all start on the weak beat, and the note values of both notes are always quarter-dotted half. The first example shown in Figure 11 is taken from the end of the second appearance of the countersubject in the exposition; the second, third, and fourth examples are all from the passage ushering in a new theme after the first large cadence on the mediant; and the fifth example is taken from a contrapuntal line set against the first subject that appears in the dominant after this first large cadence on the mediant. It is noteworthy that this glissando gesture is seen in the second, third, and fourth examples, namely, those from the passage ushering in a new theme after the first large cadence on the mediant, because it draws attention to the motivic connection to the exposition, despite all appearances of the music having moved on to new thematic material<sup>4</sup>.

In this manner, Webern makes explicit the connections between passages that seem to feature completely different thematic material. Even though the variety of thematic material is to be expected within a piece like this which is highly theological in character and each theme carries with it some sort of theological symbolism, Webern's highlighting of various motivic elements seems to suggest some sort of unity even within the variety.

Webern's *klangfarbenmelodie* approach thus reconfigures the piece in a certain way, by prioritizing motivic connections over distinctions between voices. Instrumental timbres freely jump between representing melodic fragments taken from a certain voice to those taken from

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<sup>4</sup> It is however a point of curiosity as to whether the significance of this glissando gesture could be aurally perceived during an orchestral performance of this arrangement during Webern's time, as strings players steeped in older orchestral practices typically added portamenti and glissandi to their playing from time to time. Hence, the uniqueness of this gesture in specific points within the piece might not have stood out as much.

another voice, obscuring any sense of the original division of musical elements across six distinct melodic lines.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Whether Webern adds on something new to the original Bach work through his orchestration or merely reveals certain aspects which are already latent within the piece still remains a question. In some sense, he can be seen to make explicit certain structural divisions which are already implied by the harmony, or reveal (loose) motivic connections that run throughout the piece, unifying thematic material. However, the strongly rhythmic character introduced by the extreme fragmentation of the melodic lines merely alludes to a more abstract feature (of rhythmic syncopation) that appears explicitly only in some parts of the piece. Moreover, this manner of extreme fragmentation obscures any sense of there being six independent melodic lines that comprise the entire piece, undermining the very definition of a fugue, or of any contrapuntal piece for the matter. Does Webern's orchestration of this piece then go beyond its original objective of functioning as an analytical product in some way, to creating a whole new musical work from reconstructing the material within Bach's "Ricercar a 6"?



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