

THE TONAL AND THE INSTRUMENTAL SYMBOLISM IN “MAGNIFICAT” (BWV 243), D MAJOR, OF J. S. BACH

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SUMMARY. The present study constitutes the synthesis of a detailed analysis of the musical work “Magnificat”, BWV 243, in D major, by J. S. Bach, published in book form in 2008, at the Cluj University Press publishing house in 2008. The analysis was carried out starting from the details to the whole, in each of the 12 parts, view on the following aspects: the text, the orchestral ensemble, the shape, the tonal structure, and the instrumentation. Each part attached as an Annex the coloristic spectrum of tonal-instrumental structure of hers. The synthesis of the analysis of this study presents conclusive, the full text of its historical datas, the dramaturgy of the form, the power centers, the relevance of the power centers in the poetic text, the dramaturgical dosing of the poetic text, the dramaturgy of the tonalities, the dramaturgy of the instruments using, and aspects of the illustrative program in music. The analysis is an original one, and not based on bibliographic processing.

Keywords: J. S. Bach, Magnificat, analysis, text, dramaturgy, coloristic spectrum, form, tonalities, instrumentation, power centers

Magnificat is one of the three hymns of glorify which the Holy Book puts in the mouth of the Virgin Mary, as an answer she gave to her to the cordial salutations of Elisabeth, in the house of Zachariah (*Canticum Beatae Mariae Virginis*).

This text is in the Bible, in LUKE: I 46-55.

Table 1

1. <i>Magnificat anima mea Dominum</i> 2. <i>Et exsultavit spiritus meus in Deo salutari meo.</i> 3. <i>Quia respexit humilitatem ancillae suae, ecce enim ex hoc beatam me</i>	1. „My soul doth magnify the Lord, 2. and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. 3. For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden, for,
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<p><i>dicent</i></p> <p>4. <i>Omnes generationes</i></p> <p>5. <i>Quia fecit mihi magna, qui potens est, et sanctum nomen ejus.</i></p> <p>6. <i>Et misericordia (ejus) a progenie in progenies, timentibus eum.</i></p> <p>7. <i>Fecit potentiam in brachio suo, dispersit superbos mente cordis sui.</i></p> <p>8. <i>Deposuit potentes de sede, et exaltavit humiles.</i></p> <p>9. <i>Esurientes implevit bonis, et divites dimisit inanes.</i></p> <p>10. <i>Suscepit Israel puerum suum, recordatus misericordiae suae.</i></p> <p>11. <i>Sicut locutus est ad patres nostros, Abraham et semini ejus in saecula.</i></p> <p>(12. <i>Gloria Patri et Filio, et Spiritui Sancto. Sicut erat in principio et nunc et semper, et in saecula saeculorum, Amen.</i>)</p>	<p><i>behold, from henceforth (all generations)² shall call me blessed.</i></p> <p>4. <i>All generations</i></p> <p>5. <i>For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name.</i></p> <p>6. <i>And his mercy is on them that fear him, from generation to generation.</i></p> <p>7. <i>He hath showed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.</i></p> <p>8. <i>He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree.</i></p> <p>9. <i>He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away.</i></p> <p>10. <i>He hath holpen his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy;</i></p> <p>11. <i>as he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, Gen. 17.7 and to his seed for ever. 1 Sam. 2.1-10 ”³</i></p> <p>(12. <i>Glory to the Father and to the Son, and the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end, Amen.</i>)</p>
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The text of *Magnificat* presents a stanza kind of structure that looks like the Psalms. In the Catholic service, this hymn is sung in the vesper, as it is one of the most important moments of this frame, that is the reason why, in the lapse of time, the composers were inspired in the musical composing and the recomposing of this hymn. We can remind of the period of the musical baroque: *Magnificat* of Schütz, *Magnificat* of Buxtehude, *Magnificat* of J. R. Ahle, *Magnificat* of Dionisi Erba, *Magnificat* of Vivaldi.

Magnificat in *D major* of J. S. Bach is the reference musical work for this genre in the baroque era. This musical work has a previous variant, *Magnificat* in *E b major*, written by Bach in 1723, when he spent his first Christmas day in Leipzig. Later, it is supposed that, in the first half of the year 1733, Bach rearranged his musical work, in the tonality *D major*, using a series of modifying in the details. This new formula of *Magnificat* is generally known and interpreted nowadays.

² The two words "all generations" form "Magnificat" of Bach, the text of the 4th part.

³ *The Gospel according to St. Luke*, in: *The Holy Bible*, King James Version. 2000, from the site: <http://www.bartleby.com/108/42/1.html> (09.12.2013)

The dramaturgy of the form

Table 2



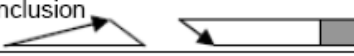
No. 1	A Av1 Av2 Av3 Av4 Av1
No. 2	Introduction A B (enlargement) [(AB)v] Coda
No. 3	Introduction A (transition) Av
No. 4	A Coda
No. 5	Introduction A Av1 Av2 Coda
No. 6	Introduction A (enlargement) (transition) Av (enlargement) Coda
No. 7	A Coda
No. 8	Introduction A (transition) Av Coda
No. 9	Introduction A (transition) Av Coda
No. 10	A B
No. 11	A Coda
No. 12	A B

The general table of the forms of the 12 parts

The weight is for the variation forms. So, from the 12 numbers, 6 are conceived in a variation way. In another 3 cases, we can come across a monostrophical form, followed by a Coda, in 2 other case, a bistrophical form of type AB, and in only a single case, the shape AB [(AB) v] with an *Introduction* and a *Coda*.

Each time in a part appears the *Introduction* and *Coda*, from a musical and an instrumental point of view, they are **identical**. It is the case of the parts 2, 5, 6, 8, 9.

Table 3

No. 1	The symmetry axe
No. 2	+S. A. ; - S. A.
No. 3	The symmetry axe
No. 4	CODA = the culmination - S. A. 
No. 5	The symmetry axe, + S. A. ; - S. A.
No. 6	The symmetry axe
No. 7	CODA = the culmination  Coda
No. 8	The symmetry axe
No. 9	The symmetry axe
No. 10	The symmetry axe
No. 11	CODA = the conclusion + S. A. 
No. 12	The symmetry axe

The table of the force centers of the parts

The general equilibrium of the component parts relies on 7 from the 12 numbers on the symmetry axe (see the parts 1, 3, 6, 8, 9, 10, 12). Three from the parts of *Magnificat* are bivalent; they have two centers of the force, so:

No. 2 - it is highlighted by the both golden sections (S. A. +, S. A. -);

No. 4 - it highlights the negative golden section; it conducts in the same time the musical discourses towards the culmination in Coda;

No. 11 - it highlights the positive golden section, the musical discourse it culminates in *Coda*.

One of the parts (no. 5) it relies on the gravity of all the 3 force centers (the positive, the negative golden sections, and the symmetry axe), and one of the parts (no. 7), it culminates **only** in the *Coda* segment.

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From a content of the text point of view, there are relevant all the 3 gravitational centers of force of this musical work.

So, **the symmetry axe of the whole musical work is in the no. 6**, the measure 12,5 and it is posing with the phrase:

“Et misericordia a progenie in progenies” (And his mercy is on them that fear him, from generation to generation.)

The positive golden section of the whole musical work is posing on the measure 46,178 from the no. 8, on the following text:

“et exaltavit humiles” (and exalted them of low degree).

And **the negative golden section** of the whole musical work is the same with the measure 11,822 from the no. 4 - a part that has as a text only the two words:

“omnes generationes” (All generations).

The key words that are highlighted by these force centers are:

- the mercy, the humble, fellowship.

Table 4

Number	The number of the measures	The number of the words
1.	90 measures	4 words
4.	27 measures	2 words
12.	42 measures	20 words

The dramatically dose of the poetic text

From a dramatic point of view, in the distribution TEXT/FORM PARTS, the 4th part is different by the importance that Bach gives to the two words: *“omnes generationes”*. The special importance of these things is highlighted by the fact that, over 27 measures of the parts, Bach processes, in a polyphonic way, **ONLY** these words.

In comparison with this retort, it is easily to notice the degree of the concentration - dilatation, which Bach makes in the first, and the last part of

this work. In the first part, over the **90 measures**, we can come across, worked, in a polyphonic way, **4 words**:

Magnificat anima mea Dominum.

While, in the last part of the musical work, in 42 measures frame (**less than the half of the first part!!!**) Bach works with **20 words**:

Gloria Patri et Filio, et Spiritui Sancto.

Sicut erat in principio et nunc et semper,

Et in saecula saeculorum, Amen.

The last word of the musical work: *Amen* appears **only for one time**, on the last two chords, a **fermata** marks the last one. The word *Amen* compared with the other words **is not worked at in a polyphonic way!!!**

The Dramaturgy of the Tonalities

The main tonality of the work is *D major*. It is imposing as an exclusive basic tonality in the first 2 parts and in the last but one part.

The character of the main tonality of the whole musical work:

"...*la gamme de ré majeur est brillante, (...)*" as Grétry⁴ (the scale *D major* is brilliant).

Chr. Fr. D. Schubert, in his work: *Ideen zu einer Ästhetik der Tonkunst* characterize the *D major*, in the following way:

"*D major. This is the tonality of the triumph, which is fit for hallelujah, in the fight cry, in the joy of the victory. That is why, the overtures, the marches, the hymns are composed in this tonality.*"⁵

Table 5

No.	The title	The basic tonality
1.	Magnificat	D major
2.	Et exultavit spiritus meus	D major
3.	Quia respexit humilitatem	b minor
4.	Omnes generationes	f # minor
5.	Quia fecit mihi magna	A major
6.	Et misericordia	e minor
7.	Fecit popentiam	G major / D major
8.	Deposuit potentes	f # minor
9.	Esurientes implevit bonis	E major
10.	Suscepit Israel	b minor / D major / e minor
11.	Sicut locutus est	D major
12.	Gloria patri	A major / D major

The general table of the main tonalities of the parts

⁴ Grétry, C., *Memoires, ou essais sur la musique*, Da Capo Press, New York, 1971, vol. II, p. 357

⁵ Schubart, Chr., D., *Ideen zu einer Asthetik der Tonkunst*, Verlag Philipp Reclam Jun., Leipzig, 1977, as a translation: "A history of the universal music. From the beginning to the 18th century", Editura muzicală, București, 1983, p. 325.

The most times, all the parts have a single basic tonality. However, there are **2 cases** in which **the parts have 2 basic tonalities** (the 7th part and the 12th one), respectively, **a case** in which the part **has 3 main tonalities** (the 10th part).

In the case of the 7th part, (*Fecit potentiam*) we consider that there are two main tonalities: *G major* and *D major*. It is real that it is deciding in the establishing of the main tonality of a musical work is the ending tonality and not the beginning one, but, in this case, *G major*, is not just a simple beginning tonality but it **dominates** the first half of the musical work. Therefore, from a structural point of view this part is a single one *crescendo* subdivided in 6 sections and *Coda*, from a tonal point of view, it is dividing into 2 sections.

In the case of the last part - no. 12. - since this is sectioned by a stop that is marked by a fermata pause (approximately in the place of the symmetry) we consider the two sections as they stay for their own. So, the main tonality of the first section is *A major*, and the main tonality of the second section is *D major*.

The 10th part (*Suscepit Israel*) has 3 main tonalities. The establishing of the main tonalities of this part is not an easy job, as the following things are taken into consideration:

- 1) this part ends in *E minor* tonality, a tonality that fills 10 measures for the total of 37 ones,
- 2) the beginning tonality of the part is *B minor*, which, in its way, extends on 7,5 measures,
- 3) The tonality *D major* imposes itself by its weight, 13,5 measures among 37 are made by Bach in this tonality.

The dramaturgy of the using of the instruments

Regarding the instrumental dramatically ethos, it is interesting to notice, that Bach uses the brass wind instruments and the tympani only in the following parts:

- 1) *Magnificat* (text: "My soul doth magnify the Lord");
- 7) *Fecit potentiam* (text: "He hath showed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.")
- 12) *Gloria patri* (text: "Glory to the Father and to the Son, and the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end, Amen.")

It **praises** God, or reveals **the power** of his arm in these parts.

The orchestral writing is knowingly put in the dramatic expressively made. It is relevant, in this way, the instrumentation of the 3rd part of *Magnificat* - *Quia*

respexit humilitatem". The text of this part is: "For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden, for, behold, from henceforth (all generations)⁶ shall call me blessed."

These are those parts **praising** the Lord or they reveal **the power** of His arm.

The instrumentation reveals two solos over the pulsation of the continuo: solo soprano I. and solo oboe d'amore.

Alfredo Casella, in his presentation of the instrument, reveals the following sonorous characteristics of his:

*"Oboe d'amore is an oboe tuned with a third down. It has the spherical pavilion (that of the usual oboe is a conic one), a fact that confers a soft sonority, a pathetically and a homogenous one, which the other related instruments do not know it. (...the technique is the same as of the usual oboe; of course, oboe d'amore is made for the quieter and for the cantabile passages.)"*⁷

The predominance of the minor tonalities (in the first place, *B minor*) - in a contrast with the major predominant colours of the two previous parts - the reduced instrumentation (only *oboe d'amore*, *Soprano I*, and *Continuo*), and the fluidic, pretty sound of the oboe d'amore, all is musical expressions of one and the same word: "*humilitatem*"

Attacca follows the 4th part from the 3rd part, a unique case in the development of the 12 parts. The writing for ensemble, in the 4th part reveals a "sonorous paste" a continuous and a uniform one, which is comprised of wind instruments, strings, chorus and continuo. This continuity divides only in those measures, which precedes and marked the culminating point of the part, the measures 21-25, *Coda*. It is remarked this continuity some "cuttings" that are made on the diagonal, by the interwoven of the pause.

The Aspects of the Illustrative Programmatism.

Comparatively with the predominant major color of the first two parts of the musical work, in **the 3rd part**, as a musical expression of the word "*humilitatem*" (humble), it is imposing, in the first plan the minor tonalities (*B minor*, *E minor*, *F # minor*, and *C # minor*). The shape is made of 2 sections, **A** and **Av**. The poetic text is symmetrically distributed in the 2 stanzas, the **A** stanza presents the first line:

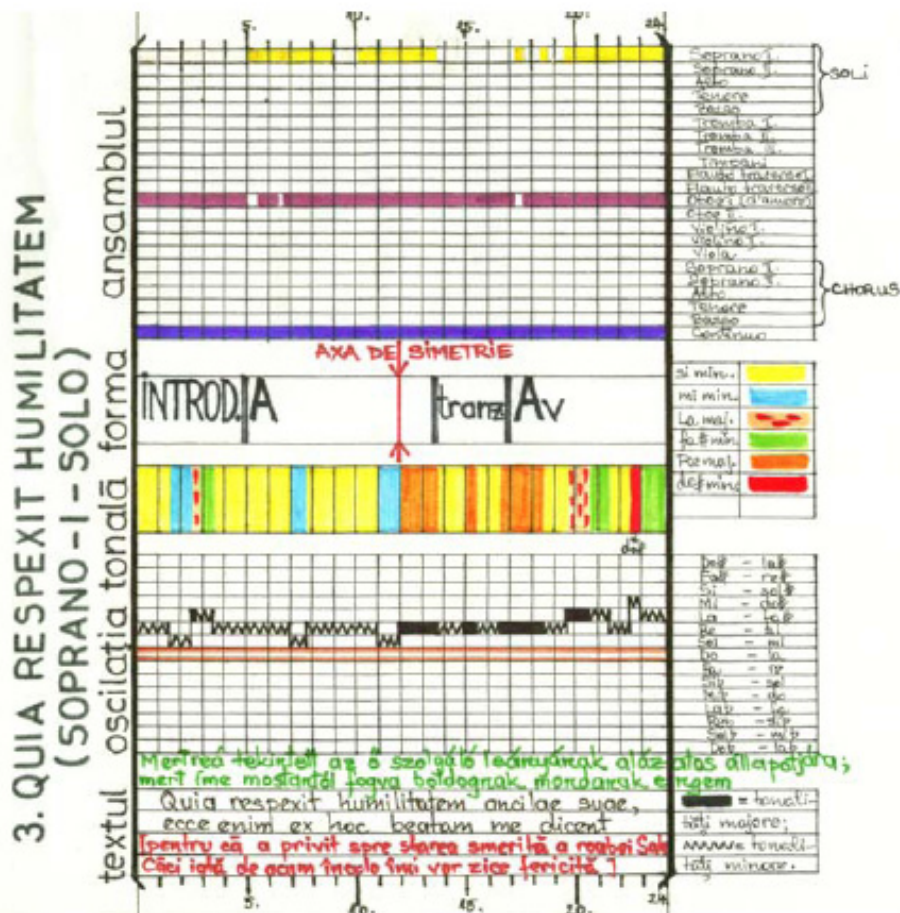
*„For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden, for, behold,
(...)”*

⁶ The two words "all generations" form "Magnificat" of Bach, the text of the 4th part.

⁷ Casella, Alfredo - Mortari, Virgilio, *Tehnica orchestrei contemporane (The Technique of Contemporary Orchestration)*, Ed. Muzicală, Bucharest, 1965, p. 54 – our translation from Romanian.

And the **Av** stanza in the 2nd line:
 “from henceforth (...) shall call me blessed.”

Ex. 1



Part 3 - the coloristic spectrum of tonal-instrumental structure

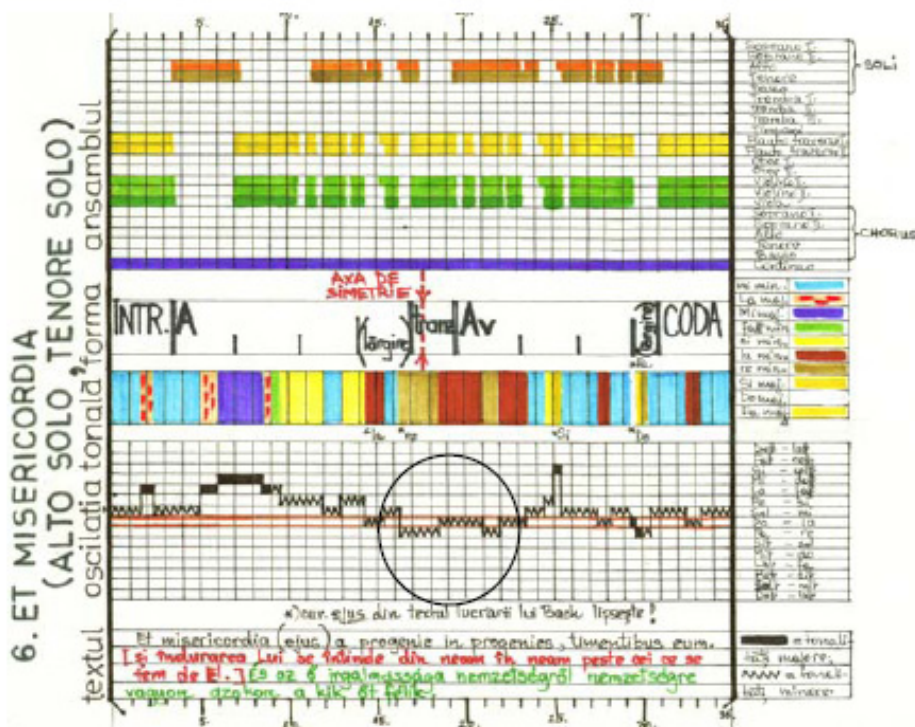
In a tonal way, in **A** stanza, as an expression of the text: “For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden,” it is highlighted the *B minor*. From the **Av** stanza, it is imposed, as a main tonality *D major*, as a tonal expression of the phrase: “from henceforth (all generation) shall call me blessed”

In the **6th part**, from the **35** measures only **6** of them are made in major tonalities. The preponderance of the minor tonalities is, in fact, a tonal dramatics expression of the divine mercy. See the text:

“And his mercy is on them that fear him, from generation to generation.”

As a musical expression "his mercy is on them that fear him, from generation to generation" Bach modulates **over** the limit of the *C major*, in the zone of the tonalities with flats.

Ex. 2



Part 6 - the coloristic spectrum of tonal-instrumental structure

The importance of this fact is the most relevant one as we can notice, along the 12 parts that Bach **only here crosses the hemisphere of the flat tonalities!** As a rest, its tonal game develops in the zone of the sharp tonalities!

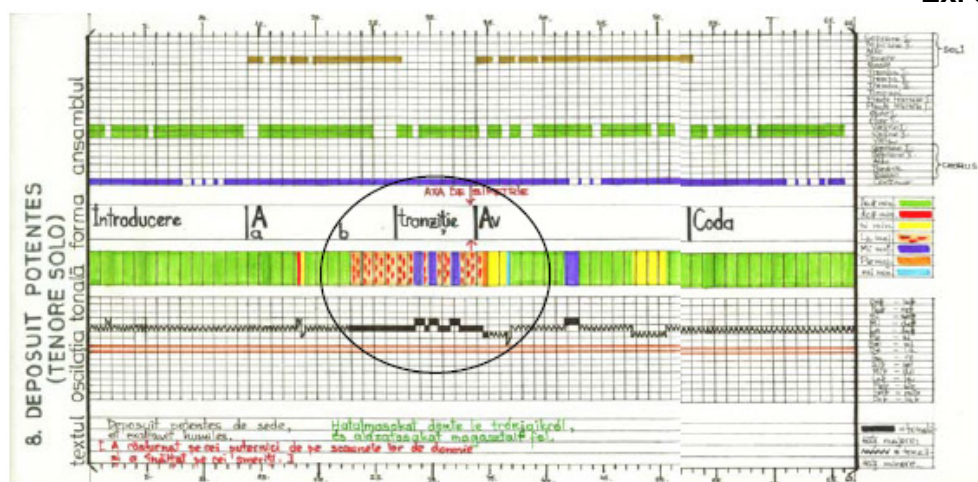
From all the minor tonalities, of this part the tonality *E minor* is imposing by its tonality.

"E minor. The simple declaration of the feminine love, a cry without a snarl, the sob with some tears, the closest hope of the most clear happiness by solving in C major, they are in the perimeter of this tonality. As, from the nature itself it is given only one colour, (it is about the only sharp, nt.), this tonality can be compared with a girl dressed in white, with a rose - like collar on her chest. From this tonality, it is passing, with a good grace, in the main tonality of *C major*, which gives to the heart and to

the ear the most complete silence.” - as it is said in his aesthetic ideas over the art of the sounds Chr. Fr. D. Schubart.⁸

The 8th part - *Deposuit potentes*, it is formally divided in 2 sections **A** and **Av** - with an *Introduction* and a *Coda*, the 2 sections are connected by a transition. The **A** section divides in 2 subsections: **a** and **b**. The **a** subsection process the first part of the phrase of the text: “*Deposuit potentes de sede*”, and the subsection **b** process the 2nd part of the phrase of the text: “*et exaltavit humiles*”. The two subsections reveal, by their succession, a tonal contrast, a related keys one, the **b** subsection, under the influence of the word “*exaltavit*” it modulates, in *A major* (the major related key of the main tonality of this part - *F # minor*).

Ex. 3



Part 8 - the coloristic spectrum of tonal-instrumental structure

The 12th part, in a formal way, divides into 2 sections, **A** and **B** whose ends are marked by two fermata pauses. The poetic text divides also into two phrases:

- 1) *Glory to the Father and to the Son, and the Holy Spirit.*
- 2) *As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end, Amen.*

The **B** section, as it is a direct expression of the part of the phrase: “*As it was in the beginning ...*” it brings, unchanged, the first 3 measures of the beginning part “*Magnificat*”. In addition, as a continuation – to the end, it will be worked on the thematic material of the same first part of the *Magnificat*.

⁸ Schubart, Chr. Fr. ,*op. cit.*, trad, p. 325-326.

The B section, of the 12th part represents the CODA OF THE ENTIRE MUSICAL WORK, and it has the role of rounding the form.

Ex. 4

Nr. 1

Musical score for "Magnificat" (BWV 243) by J.S. Bach, Nr. 1. The score is in G major and 3/4 time. It features a full orchestra and a choir. The instruments listed are Trumpets I, II, III, and IV; Flutes I and II; Oboes I and II; Violins I and II; Viola; Cello; Double Bass; Organ I and II; Alto; Tenor; and Bass. The score begins with a first measure marked with a '1'.

Nr. 12

Musical score for "Magnificat" (BWV 243) by J.S. Bach, Nr. 12. This score shows a section of the piece, with a box highlighting a specific passage. The score is in G major and 3/4 time. The instruments listed are Trumpets I, II, III, and IV; Flutes I and II; Oboes I and II; Violins I and II; Viola; Cello; Double Bass; Organ I and II; Alto; Tenor; and Bass. The score begins with a first measure marked with a '1'.

The 12th part—section B, in parallel with the 1th part

Conclusion

Magnificat of J. S. Bach, it is the reference work for this type, in the era of the musical baroque. It represents a musical work that has a dramaturgy of the shape and of the poetic text, a dramaturgy of the tonalities, of the instruments using, and of the so-called naïve (illustrative) programmatism, as it is very aware and clever made.

It represents one of the most beautiful expressions of the sublime in the music.

Translated by Maria Cozma

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