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**‘AB UNISONIS’ — MUSICAL TEXTURES AND GENRES
AND THE ECHOES OF PARALITURGICAL PRACTICES**

The rehabilitation of the *kancionál* tradition in the Czech lands after The Thirty Years War created a set of devotional circumstances probably without parallel anywhere in Catholic Europe. One of the more unusual aspects of the tradition was the paraliturgical phenomenon. Whilst it took a variety of forms, at its core was a collection of vernacular songs interspersed before and between sections of the Latin Mass (or other service). These songs usually paraphrased the part of the Mass that they complimented and were often sung by the congregation though it seems that at least some of those settings were sometimes sung by literary brotherhoods.¹ The tradition is one of a few to survive the Thirty Years War albeit with a Catholic rehabilitation. This phenomenon not only brought high and low styles together under one roof, but sometimes even brought them together in single works. A selection of sacred pieces by Šimon Brixí are used here as indicative examples.

Much of the repertoire of the *kancionál* tradition consisted of simple songs usually sung in unison (or octaves) and so there was little need for additional performance materials alas, this leaves very little in terms of performance detail. It should also be kept in mind that a vernacular settings does not necessarily indicate congregational singing the *kancionál* tradition also had links to the literary brotherhoods (*litterati*). Ignaz von Born (1742–1791) specifically associated the *litterati* with church singing and the *kancionál* tradition. He argued that the success of this curious custom had maintained ‘the pure and unaffected Bohemian language’ and that ‘the societies of the *litterati* or church singers [...] have kept

¹ On literary brotherhoods see Horyna, Martin. *Vícehlasá hudba v Čechách v 15. a 16. století a její interpreti*. *Hudební věda* 43, no. 2, 2006, pp. 117–134; Maňas, Vladimír. *Hudební aktivity náboženských korporací na Moravě v raném novověku*. (Diss., Masaryk University, Brno 2008). Another fascination case-study of the rehabilitation Utraquist repertoire and practices is in Covert Barrows, Christine. *The Music of the Bohemian Literary Brotherhoods as preserved in Prague. Národní knihovna Manuscript Prague XVII B 19* (University of Ottawa, 1996). A study of a fascinating provincial example is in Mikanová, Eva. *Mladoboleslavský literátský kůr*. In: *Mladá Boleslav od minulosti k dnešku*. Mladá Boleslav: Městský národní výbor, 1974.

the perfect institution of its musical choirs and church music evidenced by the magnificent hymn books which are still today in many churches and libraries'.² Exactly who did the singing is not always clear, but that need not be a distraction in this context other questions still remain. The surviving source materials are either silent on the matter or suggest that the vernacular paraphrases were used for special feast days or ferial masses, but a few eighteenth-century sources close to the practice suggest that peasants were also involved in singing at High Mass – though what, exactly, they sang is not clear.³ Recalling his childhood in Bohemia, Christoph Willibald Gluck (1714–87) later recounted: 'in my homeland everyone is musical; music is taught in the schools, and in the tiniest villages the peasants sing and play different instruments during High Mass in their churches'.⁴

The paraliturgical scenario described above gives the impression of two simultaneous acts of devotion: the Mass itself sung in Latin, often in a figural setting, with the vernacular paraphrases interspersed. Not only is this a peculiar, if not unique, practice to be found in Catholic Europe, but it also seems to have had a profound effect upon the composition of other figural works that sprang from the tradition. In some figural works composers make specific reference to unison singing, while for other compositions possible congregational origins remain obscure. Nevertheless, the tendencies are too tantalising to ignore. At least some of the frequently-found characteristic regional devices owe something of their origin to the *kancionál* and Mass-paraphrase tradition. These musical devices include characteristics that are indicative of either participation of the laity or congregation. Typical examples include the outright quotations of congregational material and the musical textures that follow (unisons octaves, the *alternatim* texture, and sometimes the vernacular interspersed with Latin) and musical responses to texts that evoke such participation (particularly common in the Psalms). Another popular device is the fondness for harmonising melodies in parallel thirds, sixths or in the case of settings by *litterati* composers and others

² Edler von Born, Ignaz. *Abhandlungen einer Privatgesellschaft in Böhmen*. Prague 1775, pp. 217–218. 'Seit der Regierung Kais. Karls des IV. ist die Anzahl der in böhmischer Sprache verfertigten geistlichen Lieder fast bis zum Unendlichen angewachsen. Schon in den ältesten geschriebenen Gesangbüchern findet man auf jede Feierlichkeit, auf jedes Fest der Heiligen mehrere Lieder, womit das Volk nicht nur in der Kirche, sondern auch in den Hausem und auf den Gassen seine Andacht unterhielt. Diese Lieder waren größtentheils, so viel es nämlich der Reim zuließ, aus den Worten der heiligen Schrift, und der Kirchenlehrer zusammen gesetzt, und hatten in der reinen und ungekünstelten böhmischen Sprache eine ungemeyne Anmüthigkeit. Sie waren meistens von den prager Erzbischöffen, Prälaten und Domherren verfasst. Von den Gefellschaften der Lies «raren oder Kirchensänger habe ich schon oben Erwähnung gethan. Wie viel übrigens die alten Böhmen auf die vollkommene Einrichtung ihrer musikalischen Chöre, und auf die Kirchenmusik überhaupt gehalten haben, erhellt aus den prächtigen Gesangbüchern, welche man noch bis heute in vielen Kirchen, order auch Bibliotheken verwahret'.

³ On the ferial Mass, especially songs in Latin, Mañas, V. 'Feriální mše na brněnském jezuitském gymnáziu a latinský písňový repertoár v 17. a 18. století,' (Paper in print)

⁴ J. C. Mannlich, Gluck à Paris en 1774 – Mémoires sur la musique à Paris à fin du règne de Louis XV, *La Revue musicale*, 15 1934, p. 260.

four-part settings with the parallel sonority in the outer voices in tenths (Michna, for one, was particularly fond of this latter sonority).

Šteyer's 1683 description of at least one of the roles of the *kancionál* tradition in the hands of peasants at Mass is well known, but a short section is of particular relevance here. Šteyer makes special mention of the continuity of the *kancionál* practice seemingly as a point of pride.

Our ancestors in Bohemia [Czechách] used to have a fine and very commendable custom of gathering all together in the Lord's church on Sundays and feast days, early before Holy Mass and the preaching of God's word, and the of singing sacred songs there, namely at first songs for the early morning and later on those pertaining to specific annual celebrations, or generally, of everyone singing piously together, having instituted choirs for that purpose, in which not only the ordinary townsmen but also the aldermen lords of the town and more prominent persons used to sing in Czech together with the commoners and praise the Lord God in a unified voice, reckoning this is a special point of honour [...] Although this fine tradition of singing Czech songs in church still continues unbroken in certain places, it cannot be denied, however, that the former praiseworthy ardour in singing the Lord's praise has, here and there, cooled down it is because those who gather for singing in those places are few and arrive late and some prefer to stay home or talk with each other in front of the church about various worldly matters rather to praise the Lord God in the church by means of pious singing.⁵

While this is clearly describing the Catholic tradition after the Thirty Years War, there is evidence of the pattern from much earlier too. Note that amongst the places for *kancionál* singing that Šteyer describes that they were first sung at church before Mass started ('early before Holy Mass') in addition to other designated points in the liturgy. A century earlier the English parliamentarian Fynes Moryson described a similar pattern amongst the Hussites too. Moryson noted in his 1592 visit (published in London in 1617) amongst the Hussites at Litomyšl or possibly Litoměřice ('Litomyz' in the manuscript) that they had an address from the preacher, followed by a play and then the singing of Psalms before the start of the Mass.⁶ He also notes that 'they sing the masse in Lattin, but they read the Epistle, the Gospell, the forme of Baptisme and buyriall, in the Bohemian

⁵ This preface is borrowed from the second edition (1687) of Šteyer's massive collection first printed in 1683. It is not in the first edition (the version above is from Božan). Translation adapted from Germer, Mark. *The Austro-Bohemian Pastorella and Pastoral Mass to c. 1780*. Ph.D., New York University, 1989, pp. 52–54. The above excerpt is a translation of Šteyer's preface as reprinted in J. Božan, *Slaviček Rajský na stromě Života, slávu tvorci Svému prozpěvující* (Hradec Králové, 1719). My translation partly adapted from Germer, *The Austro-Bohemian Pastorella...*

⁶ Wellek, René. Bohemia in Early English Literature. *Slavonic and East European Review*. *American Series* 2, no. 1, 1943, p. 129. I have quoted parts of Moryson's travels in Wellek that remained in manuscript in Oxford and not published in the original or subsequent editions; others are quoted from Moryson, Fynes. *An Itinerary Containing His Ten Yeeres Travell Through the Twelve Dominions of Germany, Bohmerland, Switzerland, Netherland, Denmarke, Poland, Italy, Turkey, France, England, Scotland, and Ireland*. London: John Beale, 1617.

tongue'.⁷ The Hussites also included theatrical devotions that involved the congregation, one was witnessed by Moryson at Easter.

On Easter day some hower before the morning, the Hussites came to Church, where the Preacher, as a Prologue to a Play, told them why they were assembled, then two little boys richly attired in woomans apparell, and so presenting Mary and Magdalen, went to the Sepulchre and began to lament not fynding the body of Christ, till a thirde boye like an Angel with spread winges lett downe from above with pulleys, bad them not to seeke him among the dead, for he was risen. This play ended, they sung Psalmes, and received the supper of our lord in both kyndes, till the full Congregation came, when they had Divine Service.

The quote from Moryson is indicative, rather than exceptional, of the English fascination with the non-conformist traditions of the Czech lands (especially between the 16th and 18th centuries). The Hussite origins of the Mass paraphrase tradition seems to be hinted at in 1722 by the Huguenot Michael de La Roche after his emigration to England. He speaks of accusations levelled against the Hussites (in particular about the followers of Jerome of Prague) including that they had been criticised for 'writing in the Bohemian Language some Verses and Songs containing the Words of the Canon of the Mass, and putting them into the Hands of Lay-people of both Sexes'.⁸ De la Roche reminds us that even in eighteenth-century England the unusual practice of Mass-paraphrase songs was worthy of comment. The English writers William Oldys and Edward Harley noted in 1745 that 'the greatest Part of the Bohemians are Roman Catholics, and even Bigots, yet there are many secret Protestants amongst them. Nay, we were told that many Hussites might still be found here, who have the Hussite Liturgy and Confession of Faith'.⁹ As late as 1783 the German traveller Riesbeck comments that the 'Hussites are still very numerous in the country. Some think that a fourth part of the inhabitants are of this sect, which has also spread widely in Moravia'.¹⁰ To what degree some kind of Hussite influence persisted in an otherwise Catholic context is practically impossible to gauge, but finding traces of it should not be ruled out.

Šteyer designates a number of songs to be sung before the start of Mass ('při začátku Mše svaté') and it should therefore come as little surprise that there are so many paraphrases of the Kyrie. The sounds of many of the *kancionál* melodies would still be reverberating in the ears of the congregants when the Latin Mass

⁷ Wellek, René. *Op. cit.*, p. 129.

⁸ de La Roche, Michael. *Memoirs of literature: Containing a large account of many valuable Books, Letters and Dissertations Upon several Subjects*. London 1722, p. 427.

⁹ Oldys, William – Harley, Edward. *The Harleian miscellany*. London 1745, Vol. V, p. 344.

¹⁰ Riesbeck, Johann Kaspar. *Briefe eines reisenden Franzosen über Deutschland an seinen Bruder zu Paris*. Leipzig 1783, vol. I, pp. 419–420. English translation in Riesbeck, Johann Kaspar. *Travels Through Germany in a Series of Letters*, trans. Rev. Maty, 2 vols., vol. II, Zurich T. Cadell, 1787, p. 127. The use of the word 'Hussite' by travellers to Bohemia and Moravia should be treated with some caution – perhaps they used the term more broadly to refer to non-conformists in the region.

started along with the figural music that accompanied it. Few composers at the start of the 18th century succeeded in bridging the gap between vernacular and high-art traditions better than Šimon Brixí (1693–1735).

Svaté. . . 469.

Druhá píseň při začátku Mše svaté.

Hospodine / wssech věcý Pane / myš prosy,
Ť Wšemohaucy / Otče nebeský / patš laska,
Ť Deyz nám mocnost / aš každau bšissnost / přemúřem
me pokorně tebe / za smilowanj :
wina lid swag zemský / ó milosrdny :
yšabelkau chytrost / wše protwan milost.

1. Šteyer, *Kancionál Český* (Prague, 1683), ‘Druhá píseň při začátku Mše svaté.’
[Another song for the beginning of Holy Mass]¹¹

17

G Tpts

Coro
Ky-ri-e e-lei-son, Ky-ri-e e-lei-son, Ky-ri-e e-lei-son, e-le

Vns. I & II

Org.

2. Šimon Brixí, *Kyrie et Gloria*¹²

Šimon Brixí’s *Kyrie et Gloria* in G major begins with the same strident figure that begins so many Kyrie paraphrases found in *kancionály* from the 16th century, right up into Brixí’s own lifetime (Example 1). As with so many melodies found in *kancionály* it served many texts, but in this case it nearly always serves some type of Kyrie paraphrase, making it ideal for Brixí’s brilliant adaptation (Example

¹¹ Also adapted from the Protestant tradition, ‘Hospodine wssech věcý Pane’ [Lord of all things], from Jan Roh’s *Piesně chwal božských* (Prague, 1541).

¹² Trolđa’s score is CZ-Pnm XXVIII F 205; the original is Mělník B.43.

2). The literal repetition of short melodic cells in alternation with a triadic motif in unisons and octaves (violins, trumpets and organ) and the simple harmonic movement, echo the original congregational context of the melody itself perhaps still reverberating in the church when Brixí's figural setting was heard.

Looking just briefly to a little bit later in the century, František Brixí (1732–1771) also follows the pattern of integrating elements of the paraphrase tradition in certain works. One rather remarkable setting of the Sanctus and Agnus (from early in the second half of the 18th century and preserved in the collection of the Knights of the Cross with the Red Star) contains a Czech-language Mass paraphrase of each section, revealing a degree of overlap between congregational practices and figural ones. In the case of the Sanctus, the vernacular text is 'Nejmocnější Bože Otče vždycky svatý' [Most powerful Father God always Holy] which had been used for a paraphrase (plus trope) for the Sanctus in non-conformist circles since at least as early as the 16th century.¹³ Brixí's source for the text was probably Šteyer's *Kancionál Český* (Prague, 1683), although Šteyer surely incorporated it from earlier non-conformist sources. The text underlay in the František Brixí example does not appear as a gloss or later addition, but rather both the Latin and Czech are in the same hand; the Latin preserves the original Mass text, but the Czech is a paraphrase not a translation. Although the complete manuscript has not been made available to me to study, the use of the Czech-language paraphrase as a vernacular alternative to the Latin is remarkable in a figural setting such as this. It is unusual, but far from unique.

Šimon Brixí's *Cantus adventualis* (c. 1731) is specific about the use of unisons in performance. However, it is difficult to tell if the presence of unisons in this context is intended to include, or merely evoke, congregational singing. The title page: *Cantus Adventualis / Wesele Spiwegme / Cantus firmus ab unisonis. / 2 Violini / 2 Viole concerti / cum Organo / De Musica / Simonis Brixí / Ao 1731 16 xbry / Pragae*; the vocal part itself is labeled: 'Vox unisona Cantus Firmus'.¹⁴ While the work is for 2 violins, 2 violas and basso continuo, when the *kancionál* song 'Vesele spivejme' is heard, the overall texture is reduced to two parts (Example 3).¹⁵ However, in the sonatas that act as bookends for the central section, the *kancionál* tune is always heard in unisons – with instructions in the manuscript that the violins double the 'vox unisona' part for the final verse (Example 4). While a work for Advent may seem like a special case, the liturgical season only permits a greater clarity for conventions that appear throughout the repertoire and elsewhere in the liturgical calendar.

¹³ CZ-Pkřiz XXXV B 172. Alas, the work was not made available for me to study.

¹⁴ CZ-Pnm VM 131 (Mělník D 6).

¹⁵ CZ-Pnm VM 131 (Mělník D 6)

25

1. Ve - se - le spi - vej - me, Bo - ha ot - ce chval - me,
 2. Ey Kri - sto - vé při - ští, čtve - ro pi - smo ji - sti,
 3. Pro - tož se při - prav - me, všech zlo - sti u - staň - me,

3. Šimon Brixí, *Cantus adventualis* (c. 1731), ‘vox unisona in cantus firmus’, bars 25–30¹⁶

Sonata 2
[vni 1 & 2 unis.]

Vln. I
 Vln. 1
 Vln. 2
 Org.

4. Šimon Brixí, *Cantus adventualis*, unison violins playing the kancionál tune ‘Vesele spivejme’ in unison with the voices

What becomes very interesting is that composers sometimes made stylistic distinctions depending on the presence of Czech or Latin. Some works even preserve both of these practices simultaneously that is, works that have sections in Latin (reflecting the figural styles of cosmopolitan and courtly life) as well as sections in Czech, often evoking musical characteristics associated with rural life. Perhaps best known of examples of this sort is Kopřiva’s *Missa Pastoralis*. In the latter case the frequent alternation between Latin Mass texts and Czech paraphrases is echoed by changes in musical style but there are numerous examples of this pattern.

Other sources of information on the links between the paraliturgical phenomenon and figural settings can be found in manuscript notes or other marginalia. In a similar way that some of the *kancionály* and manuscripts of paraliturgical works often give some indication of where they should be inserted (‘at the Sanctus’, ‘before the Epistle’, ‘after the sermon’, and so on), surviving sources for some figural works for the Propers can also reveal their intended liturgical place. Even in the context of figural music, surviving sources reveal that there were Czech interpolations for the Ordinary and Propers, even with figural settings. In his *Offertorium pro*

¹⁶ CZ-Pnm VM 131 (Mělník D 6).

sacre nocte (which contains an offertory and gradual) Šimon Brixí mixes Czech and Latin; the Gradual begins with the Latin offertory text ‘laetentur caeli’ but following the indication in the manuscript ‘item pro gradual’ it then proceeds into the popular Christmas song *Narodil se Kristus Pán* [Christ the Lord was born] (Examples 5 and 6). Again, there is a stylistic shift as the composer moves from Latin to Czech and this shift is also accompanied by more unison textures. This contrast was not a matter of course, in many cases vernacular elements are give a musical treatment more appropriate for court or cathedral, such a fugue.

Example 5 is a musical score for Violin I, Violin II, and Organ. The tempo is marked 'Largo'. The organ part includes 'solo' and 'in principali majori' sections, with 'pedale et basso' indicated at the end.

5. Šimon Brixí, *Offertorium pro sacre nocte*, ‘item pro graduale’

Example 6 is a musical score for Soprano (S), Alto (A), Violin I, Violin II, and Organ. The organ part includes 'pedali'.

6. Šimon Brixí, *Offertorium pro sacre nocte*, ‘item pro graduale’

The original title-page mentions the inclusion of a ‘lyra pastoritia’ almost certainly a hurdy-gurdy but no part survives. It may be that there never was a part and perhaps the layout and the wording of the title page provides a clue: ‘basso continuo / cum lyra Pastoritia’ – in other words, the hurdy gurdy player played with the organist. There is an indication in the organ part for ‘sop. rip’ when the

song *Narodil se Kristus Pán* is sung, but as it is set as a duet for soprano and alto it seems unlikely that Brixl would employ ripieno voices here, but instead the instruction may tell the hurdy gurdy player to play along with the soprano. Perhaps the 'soprano ripieno' comment refers to congregational involvement or other unison voices on the popular Christmas song. Nevertheless, the use of 'ripieno' here suggests additional voices at this point, which brings back the subject of unison textures.

S, A, unison
Coro
Glo - ri - a et ho - no - re co - ro - na - sti e - um Do - mi ne et ho - no - reco - ro
Vlns
Org.
tutti

7. Pařízek, *Offertorium de Martijre a 7 voci* (Kutná Hora, 1718)¹⁷

As was mentioned above, one of the more conspicuous textural references to congregational singing is the use of long sections or entire melodies in unisons and/or octaves. For Janovka (1701) the association of passages in unison and octaves was clearly connected to the older traditions; in fact he specifically associates the sonority with the 'music of our ancestors'.¹⁸ The two-part texture that emerges from this sort of setting (and it was not rare in the 17th century either) is found even outside those works that quote *kancionál* melodies. The popularity and (probably) frequency with which these sorts of settings were heard, had an effect upon the ordinary practises of the composers involved. So even when stepping outside of Mass-paraphrases and music for the Christmas season, an example by Pařízek from 1717 sounds remarkably galant in style (Example 7). Again, the employment of unison sonorities reduces a larger ensemble to a two-part texture. Examples like the one from Pařízek suggest that prominence of the unison- and octave-dominated texture does not necessarily emerge any explicit reference to the *kancionál* repertoire.

¹⁷ CZ-Pnm Hr 268. 'Francisci Wenseslai Pařízek'. The style of this work seems considerably later than the title-page suggests, but this should not detract from the subject of the unison textures in the work.

¹⁸ This is from his description of the double bass, e.g. violone magno. Janovka, Tomáš Balthazar. *Clavis ad thesaurum magna artis musicae*. Prague: Labaun, 1701, pp. 322–323.

Before the second half of the 18th century the texture was generally associated with rustic character.¹⁹ In the context of Czech unison-octave music in the 17th and 18th centuries, the preponderance of unison and octave sonorities can be the actual product of unison singing associated with the *kancionál* tradition or perhaps even just intended to evoke such practices. Long before the texture becomes characteristic in galant music it was already found in a sacred music in the Czech lands. The combination of the *kancionál* tradition, *alternatim praxis*, mixing of language and the sudden contrast of styles and textures, are evocative of the congregational practices to which they owe their origins.

AB UNISONIS – HUDEBNÍ STRUKTURY, FORMY A OZVĚNY PARALITURGICKÝCH PRAKTIK

V různých devočních kontextech z doby před i po Třicetileté válce se v českých zemích uplatnila paraliturgická praxe ve smyslu užití nekanonických a často vernakulárních textů, které rozšiřovaly původní rámec římskokatolické liturgie. V kancionálové tradici tento přístup vyústil v typ takzvané mešní písně, umístěné mezi jednotlivé části mše. V době katolické obnovy po Třicetileté válce začali skladatelé mimo jiné také integrovat prvky vysokého a nízkého stylu, jež slyšeli v chrámech během celého týdnu, do jakéhosi smíšeného stylu, charakterizovaného náhlými a často dramatickými kontrasty, obvykle též kombinací vybroušeného dvorského slohu a odkazem k jednoduchým kostelním písním z oné kancionálové tradice. Tato tendence se ve figurální hudbě uplatnila několika způsoby. Nejjednodušeji identifikovatelná je přímá citace či parafráze některé z oblíbených písní (například *Offertorium pro sacre nocte* nebo *Cantus adventualis* Šimona Brixiho). Obtížnější jsou postřehnutelné situace odkazující je specifické provozovací praxi – napodobení zpěvu unisono či v oktávách, praxe *alternatim*, užití mateřského jazyka a harmonické a melodické zvláštnosti často spojené s rustikálními idiomy (Zelenka, Pařízek, Peškovic, F. Brixl). Navíc, tyto typické vzorce střídání kontrastů (latiny a češtiny, vysokého a nízkého, dvorského a rustikálního) se neomezovaly pouze na kancionálovou tradici. Objevují se v poezii (viz například Kocmánkovo *Lamentatio Rusticana* z roku 1644), malbě či dramatu. Na počátku 18. století přispěly tyto vzorce k proměně řady liturgických forem a vyústily v neobvyklé hudební postupy, jež nemají paralelu nikde jinde v Evropě.

¹⁹ Parkinson argues that the unison texture is intended to evoke ‘barbarity’, citing several examples from Vivaldi, Händel, Bach and others. However, ‘barbarous’ need not carry the connotation of vileness as Parkinson implies, but rather to indicate a lack of a certain perception of elegance or sophistication (so it can be used sympathetically to evoke a rustic character, among other things). In this latter sense, the word is appropriate. Parkinson, John A. The Barbaric Unison. *The Musical Times* 114, 1973, no. 1559, pp. 23–24. Note well how Telemann implicitly praises the unison instrumental folk music of Poland and Moravia for ‘its true barbaric beauty’; in Mattheson, Johann. *Grundlage einer Ehren-pforte*. Hamburg 1740, p. 94. Also see Levy, Janet M. Texture as a Sign in Classic and Early Romantic Music. *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 35, 1982, no. 3, pp. 509–510. Levy draws attention to C. P. E. Bach’s comments that a unison texture is suitable for passages of ‘splendour and majesty’ and that the desired effect is ‘pronounced and striking’. This is a much more compelling argument than Parkinson and the implied association of this sonority with the late-Baroque tendencies toward the galant style seems correct as well.