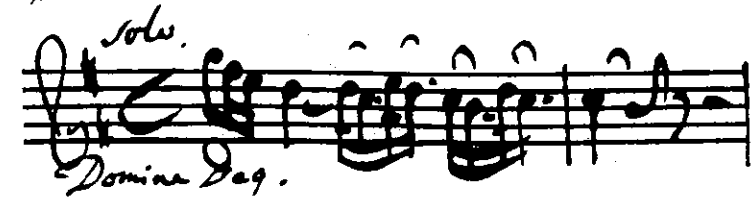


**Lombard Rhythm in the *Domine Deus* of Bach's
B minor Mass:
An Old Controversy Resolved**

Ever since 1856 scholars have disagreed on the interpretation of the inverted dotted (Lombard) rhythm that appears in the opening measure of the autograph flute part in the duet *Domine Deus* from Bach's *B minor Mass* (Ex. 1).¹



Julius Rietz, who edited the *B minor Mass* for the *Bach-Gesellschaft*, relied heavily on the original performing parts of the *Kyrie* and *Gloria* that Bach had delivered to the Saxon Court in Dresden on, or about, July 27, 1733. The reason for Rietz's reliance on these parts was that the autograph score of the *B minor Mass* was in 1856 still in Zurich, in the hands of Hermann Nägeli, the son and heir of the Swiss music publisher, Hans Georg Nägeli. Printing measure 1 of the flute part for the first time, Rietz observes:³

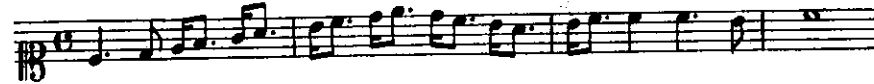
The passage is found in this form only this one time, not even in the violin which, imitating the flute, enters one measure later. Therefore, we have given [this passage] everywhere in even sixteenth notes.⁴

How, in the following year, Bach's autograph score was delivered to the *Bach-Gesellschaft* is a detective story of its own.⁵ Since Rietz found that in this score

Bach had not notated the opening measure of the flute part in Lombard rhythm, there was no reason for him to change his mind regarding this measure in his revised edition of the *B minor Mass* of 1857.

Philipp Spitta, quoting the same measure, is in agreement with Rietz when he, too, abstains from applying Lombard rhythm to the corresponding phrases as they occur in the rest of the movement. Spitta says:⁶

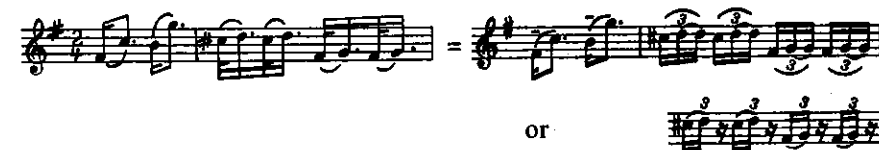
Later on, where the theme recurs, we find in the second half of the bar, simple semiquavers, phrased in pairs; thus the dotted mode of notation only indicates that the first is closely joined to the second, and to be accented, and not that it is of less value than the second. A manual of music by J.G. Walther of 1708, the original autograph of which is in my possession, says on this subject: "*Punctus serpens*, indicates that notes written as follows, should be slurred," e.g.:—



This is, however, no clear parallel to Bach's measure because the notes in Walther's example are not slurred and, hence, need the dot to indicate slurred execution. In Bach's case we have both: slurs above each pair of notes as well as Lombard notation with dots at the end of each pair. Therefore, Bach's dots cannot refer to slurring, since the slurs are already there, but must be understood rhythmically. It is, further, somewhat baffling that Spitta calls on Walther as his chief witness rather than on Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, who has the following to say about Lombard rhythm:⁷

Because the phrases are slurred, the first note is not to be executed too briefly [particularly] when the tempo is moderate or slow; for otherwise too much time would be left over. The first note is to be marked by gentle pressure, but by no means by a short jolt or a too sudden push.

Wilhelm Rust, the editor of most of Bach's cantatas for the *Bach-Gesellschaft*, seems to be the first one to have come to grips with this rhythmical problem. As editor of the *Trauer-Kantaten*, he recommends as early as 1864—i.e., long before Spitta—the following mode of execution for the bass aria *Rühmet Gottes Güte und Treue* from Cantata 195:⁸



Exactly one hundred years after the old *Bach-Gesellschaft* edition, Friedrich Smend, in his vast Critical Report to the *Neue Bach Ausgabe (NBA)* of the *B minor Mass*, fails for some strange reason to mention Bach's peculiar notation of this opening measure in the autograph flute part.⁹ For this sin of omission Georg von Dadelsen berates him in his exhaustive review of Smend's new edition of the *B minor Mass*, ending his description of the measure in question with the significant words:¹⁰

This type of short-long execution applies, of course, likewise to the ensuing corresponding sixteenth figures of this movement.

By recommending application of Lombard rhythm to the rest of the movement, von Dadelsen concurs with Alfred Dürr, who already in 1955 had taken a similarly written measure from the E-flat major version of the *Magnificat* to be Bach's hint at dotted execution in like and similar passages of the movement.¹¹ Although in the soprano aria *Quia respexit* from the *Magnificat* Bach indicates regular rather than reversed dotted rhythm, Dürr points to the flute measure from the *B minor Mass* as an applicable parallel to strengthen his advocacy of dotted execution.

This interpretation, based on Quantz,¹² is passionately opposed by Frederick Neumann, who found an ingenious explanation for the Lombard rhythm in the flute part of the *Domine Deus*:¹³

Several scholars, among them von Dadelsen, Dürr, and, with reservations, Mendel, see in the flute measure an indication that the short-long rhythm was to be used throughout the piece. . . . That it is in one part *only* compounds the improbability, since it would force us to assume the existence of a convention enjoining all performers to imitate a rhythmic pattern which they hear someone else announce. . . . The *Domine Deus*, with its stepwise 16th notes in C meter, was a textbook case for the use of the French *Inégales*, and it so happened that the chief flutist in Dresden at the time was M. Buffardin, a Frenchman. Buffardin, or, for that matter, his disciple, Quantz (who was still in Dresden at the time of the presentation in 1733), would have been inclined to play [like this]:



Bach's short-longs at the beginning were simply an antidote against the anticipated long-shorts. They were Bach's subtle way of saying, "Do not play it *à la française*." This would easily explain why this episode is so brief; it was enough to get the idea across and not so long as to produce actual short-longs. It also explains why it appeared in that particular flute part and not in any other part or score, and why Bach never used it anywhere else. If this explanation is correct, it will add another telling point *against* the use of inequality in Bach.

Not this specific case, but F. Neumann's general interpretation of *notes inégales* was subsequently attacked by Robert Donington¹⁵ and taken up again on November 11, 1973, at the meeting of the American Musicological Society in Chicago.

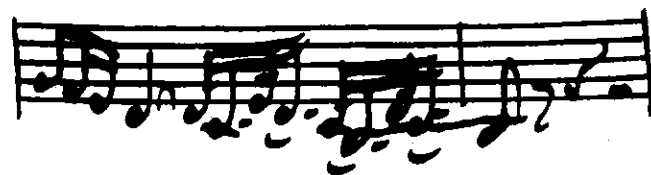
Approximately at the time that F. Neumann's thought-provoking article appeared, Nikolaus Harnoncourt let the flutist in his recording of the *B minor Mass* execute his part in the *Domine Deus* in Lombard rhythm, while asking the violins and viola to play even sixteenth notes throughout. In his extended foreword to the recording,¹⁶ Harnoncourt justifies his interpretation as follows:

This rhythm is found only in the first bar, and is an important indication that in Bach's music two equal note values are frequently to be played unequally. Now, notes slurred in pairs were very often executed in "Lombardic" rhythm, . . . without this having to be indicated specially. We believe this rhythmicizing should only appear in the solo part, and not in the analogous passages in the tutti strings, since it is a truly solo articulation, and since the uniformity in principle of analogous passages, frequently demanded today, by no means corresponds to baroque practice.

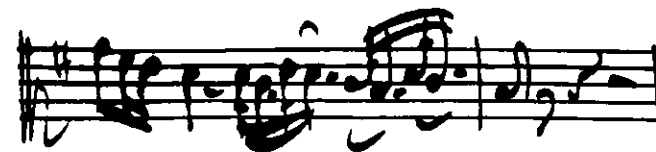
It can now be documented that Harnoncourt's acceptance of a rhythmic discrepancy between flute and strings is not what Bach intended. Neither does Bach agree with Frederick Neumann's interpretation of the measure as the composer's "short but necessary" antidote to M. Buffardin's natural inclination of playing this phrase as *notes inégales* of long-short values. The reason for Bach's rejection of both Harnoncourt's and Neumann's theses is, that Bach himself notated two further measures in Lombard rhythm.

I discovered this during a side trip from the Leipzig Bachfest 1972 to Dresden where I was permitted to see the original parts of the *Missa*.¹⁷ Since the *Traversiere I* is among the better preserved parts, it was easy enough to verify the reversed dotted rhythm in the opening measure as well as the absence of this type of notation in the remainder of the movement. Hoping perhaps to find in Bach's performing parts the answer to the opposing views held by F. Neumann and N. Harnoncourt, I found that Bach had actually written two further measures in Lombard rhythm. They appear in the particularly well preserved second violin and viola parts:¹⁸

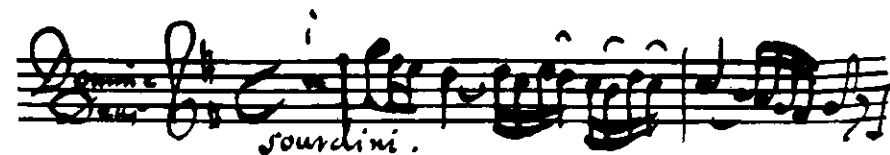
Violino II:



Viola:



Both parts are unquestionably in Bach's own handwriting. In each one of the two newly found cases, the Lombard rhythm appears in measure 27. This is the only measure in which second violin and viola are called upon to play the opening theme of the movement. The measure is heard in unison with the first violin. The latter, however, gives neither in the autograph part nor in the duplicate part, copied by Wilhelm Friedemann Bach, any indication of Lombard notation.¹⁹



If the first violin part had also been found to show Lombard rhythm, there would be no question as to its application. But such is not the case. At the same time, the unmistakable (and so far apparently unobserved) appearance of Lombard rhythm in both autograph second violin and viola parts—and that at the only place where its players might have been in doubt as to its proper execution—is certainly a new and strong point in favor of dotted performance.

Yet the old question remains: why does the first violin part lack Lombard notation? It was Bach's habit to write down no more than was absolutely necessary. For example, in his first cantata, *Aus der Tiefe rufe ich, Herr, zu dir* (BWV 131), Bach marked the frequently changing tempi with utmost care and precision. Although the autograph score of the five-movement composition shows twelve separate tempo entries, there is none for the fourth movement. There must be a reason for this apparently strange omission. In this chorale-aria Bach employs the same hymn tune, *Herr Jesu Christ, du höchstes Gut*, he had already used in the second movement, likewise a chorale-aria. If one plays and sings the eighth notes that in the fourth movement proceed in triplets fifty percent faster than in the second movement, the *cantus firmus* will retain the same pace it had in the second movement, which Bach had called *Andante*. Bach apparently took such simple consideration for granted and hence spared himself the trouble of a new tempo indication.

The situation in the *Domine Deus* from the *B minor Mass* is not much different. The first violin follows the flute by only one measure, and that, in literal imitation.



Is it not more than likely that Bach simply relied on the musical ear of the violinist—probably Vivaldi's protégé, Pisendel—whom he could expect to execute this phrase the way he had just heard it played by the flutist and the way the flutist would take it up again in measure 3? This is, after all, primarily a flute piece. Not only had the first violinist just had his exuberant solo in the *Laudamus te*, but also one that is likewise characterized by short-long rhythm. In the *Domine Deus* the first violin is not *primus inter pares*. It is muted and reduced to but occasional partnership, playing rather a game of follow the leader with the reigning flute.

But it is measure 27 that settles the argument in favor of Lombard execution. This measure is to be played in unison by the two violins and the viola:



Since Bach notated this measure in the second violin and viola parts in Lombard rhythm, the first violin could not possibly play even sixteenths against the alternating thirty-second and dotted sixteenth notes that the two other instruments were expressly requested to play. The *violino primo* simply had to fall in line with them.

If this measure, on account of its pairs of slurred descending notes, invites Lombard execution, as Harnoncourt rightly observes, why did Bach take the trouble of writing it out three times in Lombard fashion? Or, looking at it from a more practical angle: if a flutist were told that Bach had notated this measure in Lombard rhythm, would he not play it quite automatically in the following manner?



Bach may well have sensed that Purcell's, Telemann's, and Vivaldi's infatuation with this fashionable rhythm might lead to a performance that would spread Lombard interpretation also to the first half of the measure. By his precise notation, Bach made it abundantly clear what he wanted and what he wanted to avoid. What mattered to him was the contrast between even flowing note values in the first half of the measure and rhythmical refinement through the four pairs in Lombard rhythm in the second half. This subtle contrast is a stylistic idiosyncrasy of Bach that is essential to the whole movement and, hence, must be understood by the performer and brought out in his interpretation.

The fact that this dotted rhythm appears not, as heretofore had been assumed, in only one, but in three out of the four relevant instrumental parts, and that at the two most strategic points (measures 1 and 27), should solve this old and vexing rhythmic problem which has plagued the performance history of the *B minor Mass* since 1856. If the facts presented here are accepted, future performances of the *B minor Mass* that aspire to historical correctness will have to apply Lombard rhythm—probably best in terms of C.P.E. Bach's definition—to these three measures and all corresponding phrases in the *Domine Deus*.²⁰

Later (after 1741) Bach parodied the *Domine Deus* as middle movement of the three-movement Christmas cantata *Gloria in excelsis Deo* (BWV 191), setting it there to the words *Gloria Patri et Filio et Spiritui sancto*. Just as the score of the *B minor Mass* from which the *Gloria Patri* was transcribed gives no notational hint of Lombard execution, so, also, does this later score fail to indicate Lombard rhythm. Only the original performing parts of Cantata 191 might have shed light on the way Bach may have felt about the application of Lombard rhythm some eight years after he had penned this rhythm into the parts of the *Domine Deus*. The sources, however, desert us here. The parts of Cantata 191 have not survived. Even if they had survived and shown no trace of Lombard notation, this hypothetical fact would in no way undermine Bach's

clear intention as far as the rhythmic interpretation of the *Domine Deus* is concerned. That Bach replaced the solo flute of the *Domine Deus* by two *flauti traversi all'unisono* in the later cantata might be construed as speaking against Lombard performance in the latter. The trill on f-sharp—a note that is difficult to play perfectly in pitch on the Baroque flute—renders Lombard execution of this pair of sixteenth notes practically impossible. But this is precisely the pair that was not meant to be played in the Lombard manner in the *Domine Deus*.

A final question remains. Why did Bach specify Lombard rhythm only in the performing parts of the *Domine Deus* and not in the score? Beyond the fact that Bach's parts generally contain more precise markings and more detail than his scores, the answer here seems even more obvious. Bach delivered the parts of the *Missa* to the Saxon Court in Dresden in the hope that his new sovereign would want to hear the work dedicated to him performed. Bach, thus, had to assume that such a performance, or later performances, might take place in the absence of the composer. To safeguard as correct a performance as possible in Dresden, Bach not only wrote out most of the parts himself—which could be expected in such a work of homage—but also clarified as much detail as possible, including the three strategic measures from the *Domine Deus* notated in Lombard rhythm. Since Bach retained the score, any performances in Leipzig would naturally take place under his own direction. Hence, questions regarding execution could readily be answered by the composer himself.²¹

Notes

1. Except for the two final paragraphs, this report appeared first in German as the major portion of an article in the *Bach-Jahrbuch 1974* that was published in September 1975.
2. Reproduced by kind permission of the Music Division of the *Sächsische Landesbibliothek* in Dresden (D.D.R.).
3. *BG* 6, 1856, p. xx.
4. The translations are by the author (except for those referred to by footnotes 6 and 16).
5. Cf. G. Herz, *The Performance History of Bach's B minor Mass*, in *The American Choral Review*, XV/1 (1973): 16f. and above, p. 197.
6. Spitta, *Johann Sebastian Bach*, vol. III, p. 49, footnote 60.
7. C.P.E. Bach, *Versuch. Das dritte Hauptstück*, par. 24, p. 128.
8. *BG* 13/1, p. xvi.
9. Smend, *Kritischer Bericht* to *NBA*, Serie II, Band 1, 1956, pp. 289ff.
10. Georg von Dadelsen, *Friedrich Smends Ausgabe der h-moll-Messe von J.S. Bach*, in *Die Musikforschung*, XII, 1959, p. 331.

11. *Kritischer Bericht* to *NBA*, *Magnificat*, Serie II, Band 3, 1955, p. 46f.
12. J. Quantz, *Versuch einer Anleitung die Flöte traversière zu spielen*, Berlin, 1752, Chapter XI, paragraph 12.
13. F. Neumann, *The French Inégales, Quantz, and Bach*, in *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, XVIII (Fall 1965): 355-57.
14. F. Neumann overlooks here that Bach notated also the first of the four pairs of 16th notes at the end of the measure in Lombard rhythm. (Cf. the facsimile of this measure on p. 221).
15. In *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, XIX (Spring 1966): 112-14.
16. *Vienna Concentus Musicus*, Telefunken, SKH—20.
17. They left Dresden only once since 1733, the year in which Bach delivered them to the Court of Saxony. During the last years of World War II, they were removed for safekeeping and, thus, escaped the devastating bombing of Dresden at the end of the war. They were, however, exposed to dampness that caused particularly the outer parts, such as the Clarino I, to deteriorate to a dangerous state of brittleness. The inner parts are fortunately still in fair, some even in good, condition.
18. See the acknowledgment expressed in footnote 2.
19. See footnote 2. The apparently misplaced notes, dots, etc., have bled through from the other side of the page.
20. This was done very convincingly at the Bethlehem, Pa., Bach Festival on May 15 and 22, 1976, under the direction of Alfred Mann, with John Wummer playing the flute part, and repeated at the 51st *Bachfest* of the *Neue Bach Gesellschaft* at Philharmonic Hall in West Berlin on August 26, 1976.
21. However, the handwriting of the famous dedicatory letter that accompanied the *Kyrie* and *Gloria*, as well as that of the title page to the parts of the *Missa*, is that of a Dresden copyist. From this fact and the past tense used on the title page, namely: "bezeigte," that is, "showed" or "expressed with the enclosed *Missa* his most humble devotion the author J.S. Bach," Hans-Joachim Schulze has drawn the sensible conclusion (in *Kongressbericht 1966*, Kassel-Leipzig 1970) that Bach—contrary to former opinion—had apparently had an opportunity to perform the *Missa* in Dresden at the time he delivered the parts to the Saxon Court.

Studies in Musicology, No. 73

George Buelow, Series Editor

Professor of Music
Indiana University

Other Titles in This Series

- | | | |
|--------|--|------------------------|
| No. 78 | <i>Opera Seria and the Evolution of Classical Style, 1755-1772</i> | Eric Weimer |
| No. 79 | <i>Tonal Coherence in Mahler's Ninth Symphony</i> | Christopher Orlo Lewis |
| No. 80 | <i>Viennese Harmonic Theory from Albrechtsberger to Schenker and Schoenberg</i> | Robert W. Wason |
| No. 81 | <i>Roger Sessions and His Music</i> | Andrea Olmstead |
| No. 82 | <i>Style and Structure in the Praeludia of Dietrich Buxtehude</i> | Lawrence Leo Archbold |
| No. 83 | <i>Schoenberg's 'Moses and Aron': Idea and Representation</i> | Pamela White |
| No. 84 | <i>Thorough-Bass Accompaniment According to Johann David Heinichen</i> | George Buelow |
| No. 85 | <i>The Orchestra in the Nineteenth Century: Physical Aspects of its Performance Practice</i> | Daniel J. Koury |
| No. 86 | <i>Lowell Mason: His Life and Work</i> | Carol A. Pemberton |

Essays on J.S. Bach

by
Gerhard Herz

Emeritus Professor of Music History
University of Louisville
Louisville, Kentucky



UMI RESEARCH PRESS
Ann Arbor, Michigan