BACH Ciaccona for Solo Violin:
Hidden Chorales and Messages

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The Sonatas and Partitas for Solo Violin (BWV 1001-1006) by Johann Sebastian Bach is one of the most significant collections ever written. This is especially true for the Ciaccona, from the d-minor Partita, which is considered to be, on the one hand the most mysterious, and on the other, the most outstanding movement in this collection. It has generated many debates over the last fifty years among researchers and violinists. The range of ideas and opinions surrounding the work, combined with the little information from Bach’s own documents and accounts, have created an enigmatic and mysterious aura around the composition and have further isolated it as a stand-alone masterpiece.

What special meaning did the Ciaccona have for Bach? What messages did Bach conceal in the texture? What are the hidden messages of the chorales within the Ciaccona? Is the Ciaconna really a memorial to his first wife Maria Barbara? Can we say with certainty that Bach really knew anything about numerology, or can anyone make own interpretations on that issue?

The main focus of this paper will be about hidden chorales that Dr. Helga Thoene was able to find in this piece. She specializes in numerology, symbolism, and some historical aspects in Bach’s music, with a particular focus on the Ciaccona. This paper will discuss some of her statements that are relevant to the performer of this piece, that potentially clear up some mystery surrounding the work, and that help the individual performer to have additional insight into the work as they prepare it for performance.
The Historical Setting

Bach completed his sonatas and partitas for solo violin no later than 1720, the date on his manuscript of all six pieces. Bach turned 35 that March and in July buried Maria Barbara Bach, his wife of 12 years.¹ This particular year was the epicenter of Bach’s career as a Kapellmeister at the court of the Prince of Anhalt, Leopold in Cöthen. This engagement was unique for Bach in that it did not require his skills as an organist or church musician. Therefore, he had time to compose something else—instrumental music. Many of his works from this period are famous collections now; i.e., the Brandenburg Concertos, the first volume of the Well-Tempered Clavier, six sonatas for violin and harpsichord, and many others.²

“The six solo violin pieces are one of these comprehensive collections that Bach intended for performance and edification. They are divided into two sets of three pieces: three “sonatas” and three “partias” (as Bach spelled “partitas” in his autograph score).”³ The three sonatas are in the sonata da chiesa (church-sonata) form. They all start with a slow movement followed by a fugue, then another slow movement and a fast last

² Ibid., 7.
³ Ibid.
movement. The three partitas, on the other hand, are in the form of sonata da camera (chamber-sonata). They contain a number of dance movements. This collection explores the widest possible range of music for violin of the early eighteenth century, and offers an extraordinary palette of violinistic and compositional possibilities.

In the history of the violin repertoire “senza basso,” the Sonatas and Partitas certainly reach a peak in this genre. Luckily, Bach’s original manuscript Sei Solo á Violino senza Basso accompagnato from the year 1720 has survived.

According to Thoene, the sonatas and partias are not just textless instrumental compositions. They turn out to be a complex enigmatic language, which is concealed behind voicing and numbers. It is the language of chorale-quotiation and rhetorical music figures, which clarify, make a certain sense and certify the text. The set-up of these works is as follows:

Sonata G minor – Partia B minor
Sonata A minor – Partia D minor
Sonata C major – Partia E major

It is interesting that the root position of these keys outlines the Hexachordum Durum:

\footnotesize


G A B C D E (Image 1.). The order of these keys within the cycle is G B A D C E. It equals the symmetric picture of interval steps: third- second- fourth- second- third (3-2-4-2-3) (see Image 2).

Image 1 + 2 Helga Thoene, Johann Sebastian Bach’s Ciacona, page 26.

Johann Sebastian Bach and the Gematria

The autograph consists of 41 pages of full written score in the manuscript. Each of these six works contains the title “á Violino Solo senza Basso.” Only the first sonata contains the composer’s name: di J. S. Bach. The number of pages, 41, is equal to the number sum of Bach’s name: J. S. Bach 41 (9+18+14).\(^7\) This leads directly to the Gematria method, which is a method of putting letters into numbers, which equals the

order of the alphabet letters. This is a very old procedure and is derived from the Greeks, but is also largely used in Jewish texts, most notably in those associated with the Cabbala (a method to interpret the Bible). There is one “smaller” numeric pattern in existence (besides the large counting in decades, as it is in the Greek and Jewish alphabet), the one in the Latin alphabet. The small counting is from A=1 to Z=24, although the letters I and J=9, as well as U and V=20, i.e., equal the same number. “In Bach’s day it was one of the techniques listed among the “loci topici” in poetry textbooks. Although the paragram technique does not appear in books on music theory, it is possible that musicians may have applied it to music.”

The following alphabetical order with the equivalent numbering has been found in the tract “DE CABBALA PARAGRAMMATICA,” which is listed in Johannes Henningius penned “Cabbalalogia,” Leipzig, 1683.

Image 3 Helga Thoene, Johann Sebastian Bach’s Ciaccona, page 30.

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“The number alphabet was first introduced to musicology by Friedrich Smend. Smend and his colleague Martin Jansen spent many years trying to discover the meanings of numbers that recur in the works of J. S. Bach. They began from the premise that every numerical relationship in the score was consciously placed there by the composer and could therefore be considered symbolic.”\textsuperscript{10} Since we are using the same letters from the alphabet for naming the music tones- A B C D E F G H (B)- the Gematria method can be used here in the same way. The chromatically modified note values contain the sum of the letters involved (using the German way of chromatically modified tones: -IS= #, -ES=b). For example F#= FIS=33 (F=6 I=9 S=18).

The gematric value of the name B A C H equals the note value, B=2 A=1 C=3 H=8 (Image 4a). That adds up to a number of 14 in total. The number of Bach’s full name adds up to 158 (Image 4b).\textsuperscript{11} The same sum can be found in the last measure of his Fugue in the g minor Sonata, where Bach encodes his signature at the end of the first pair of movements (Image 5).


Image 4 Helga Thoene, Johann Sebastian Bach’s Ciaccona, page 31.

Image 5 Helga Thoene, Johann Sebastian Bach’s Ciaccona, page 31.
The other part of counting refers to the biblical numbers of the Old and New Testament, which plays an exposed role in the “Sei Solo”. They appear in multiple combinations and are affiliated with one of the most important components in this cycle. Within the three Sonatas (G–minor, A–minor, and C–major) biblical numbers are of significance. A fugue’s theme, from its very opening, can contain geometrical forms, arithmetical calculated sums, and gematrical numbers simultaneously. In addition to this, it contains Bach’s signature. On top of all of the above, the melodic line might expose a hidden Chorale quotation. Hence, the fugue first motive goes far beyond its melodic and contrapuntal function. That is where the abstract sounding form pulls back its curtain and a hidden language becomes its shape.12

The Chorale Quotations without Words

For the purpose of this research, the meaning of a chorale in this paper will be referred to both, melody and sacred text. The chorale quotations that exist in all of the three Sonatas and in the Ciaccona, consist mostly of single melodic lines. But sometimes the first and last lines of a verse can appear right after each other, or even overlap. Regardless, these lines carry with them all the meaning of the respective chorale’s text.

The determination of the text line belonging to a certain chorale (within these works) depends on multiple factors. Some of the chorale quotations can emerge in the chords based on their melody line; therefore, they are not difficult to observe. Even if they are short, they can be heard as a cantus firmus. The chorale quotations as cantus firmus are contained in the harmony of the polyphonic line; they even can affect the harmonic outcome of a phrase or a complete movement. Sometimes in the arpeggiated chords, the chorale melody notes appear on weak beats, and displaced in time, but can fill the harmony even in their absence. They also might change voicing within the same line (also partially based on the somewhat limited violin chord technique). That means the chorales would not run in a linear motion in the same voice, but would move around within the voices.13

The chorale melodies are often being used in a free meter and rhythm, because of their need to be integrated into the violin part. This might be one of the reasons they may be difficult to hear, but easy to see in the score. Often two or three chorale quotations are running simultaneously. Their dialogue and melody collaborate in a contrapuntal manner. Bach often connects his four-letter name with the imaginary text of the chorale quotations. This is because of the descending chromatic line D-C#-C-(H)-B-(Bb)-A, which displays the affectus tristitiae, the state of grief. The text line “Gib uns Geduld in Leidenszeit” (“Grant us patience in time of sorrow”; from the Lord’s Prayer, Martin Luther) is one of the quotations to receive the lament bass line. The word “Geduld”

(“patience”) goes along with the rising A-B-H-C, and “Leidenzeit” (“time of sorrow”) with the falling C-H-B-A. Bach refers here to his own personal time of grief.\textsuperscript{14}

\textbf{The Chorales used in the Ciaccona and their Derivation}

There are eleven chorales used in the Ciaconna overall; six in the first minor part, five in the major, and three repeated from the first minor part in the third part. The main chorale used in the Ciaccona is “Christ lag in Todesbanden” (“Christ Lay in Death’s Bonds”). This chorale’s first and last line frame the whole three-parted Ciaccona (and the first part on itself). This chorale derived from Martin Luther (1483-1546) and is a hymn for the first day of Easter celebration, written in 1524. It is also found in Bach’s Cantata (BWV 4, Number 2, a Duet for Soprano and Alto). Since this is one of Bach’s first works, he revised it several times. Today, no one can really tell how much of the original manuscript is left.\textsuperscript{15} It was first written around 1707-08. The table below (Image 6) shows the relevant text as well as its translation. The lines used in the Ciaccona are highlighted:

\textsuperscript{14} Helga Thöene, Johann Sebastian Bach Ciaccona: Tanz oder Tombeau[Ciaccona: Dance or Tombeau], (Oschersleben: dr. Ziethen Verlag, 2009): 53.

### The chorale “Dein Will’ gescheh, Herr Gott, zugleich” is based on the Lord’s Prayer and the line “Thy will be Done”. The translation of this chorale is “Our Father, Thou in Heaven Above” and written by Martin Luther in 1539. Bach used it as well.

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17 Michael T. Murphy, “Performance Practice of Johann Sebastian Bach’s Passio Secundum Johannem-A Study of 25 Years of Recorded History as Influenced by Events Surrounding the Historically Informed Performance Movement” (PhD diss., Florida State University, 2008), 107.

18 Martin Luther, The Handbook to the Lutheran Hymnal (St. Louis: Concordia House, 1942), 324-325.
later in the *St. John Passion* (BWV 245, Number 5, Oratorio for Good Friday), in the year 1724.¹⁹

Image 7²⁰ Text and translation of the chorale “Dein Will’ gescheh, Herr Gott”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5. Choral</th>
<th>5. Chorale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dein Will gescheh, Herr Gott, zugleich Auf Erden wie im Himmelreich.</strong>&lt;br&gt;Gib uns Geduld in Leidenszeit,&lt;br&gt;Gehorsam sein in Lieb und Leid;&lt;br&gt;Wehr und steur allem Fleisch und Blut,&lt;br&gt;Das wider deinen Willen tut!</td>
<td><strong>Your will be done, Lord God, likewise on earth as in heaven.</strong>&lt;br&gt;<em>Grant us patience in time of sorrow,</em>&lt;br&gt;<em>to be obedient in love and suffering;</em>&lt;br&gt;<em>check and guide all flesh and blood</em>&lt;br&gt;<em>that acts contrary to Your will!</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“Befiehl du deine Wege” (“Commit your path”) has a more difficult origin. The melody was originally composed by Hans Leo Hassler around 1601. It had different texts back then written by several authors. Also there exists a different melody, too (composed by Bartholomäus Gesius, 1603). However, Bach used Paul Gerhard’s text from 1653, and used it also later in his *Saint Matthew Passion* (BWV 244, Number 44, in 1727).²¹
Befiel du deine Wege,
und was dein Herze kränkt,
Der allertreusten Pflege,
Des, der den Himmel lenkt,
Der Wolken, Luft und Winden
Gibt Wege, Lauf, und Bahn,
Er will auch Wege finden
Daß dein Fuß gehen kann.

Commit your path,
and whatever troubles your heart,
to the most faithful caretaker,
He, who directs the heavens,
who to the clouds, air, and winds
gives path, course, and passage,
He will also find ways
for your feet to follow.

The original text of “Wo soll ich fliehen hin” (“Where shall I flee”) (Image 4)\textsuperscript{23} was completely different. The first known composer to write the melody and the text was Jacob Regnart, 1574. This song was called “Venus, both you and your child (Cupid) are blind.” Bach used the text written later by Johann Heermann, in 1630.\textsuperscript{24} Bach re-used this chorale several times himself, but the earliest number is BWV 5. It is equally well known with a different set of words “Auf meinen lieben Gott” (Image 5).\textsuperscript{25} This one appears in his Cantata BWV 188 as the last chorus.


Image 9 Text and translation of the chorale “Wo sol lich fliehen hin”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Chor</th>
<th>1. Chorus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wo soll ich fliehen hin,</td>
<td>Where shall I flee,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weil ich beschweret bin</td>
<td>since I am burdened</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mit viel und großen Sünden?</td>
<td>with many great sins?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wo soll ich Rettung finden?</td>
<td>Where shall I find rescue?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wenn alle Welt herkäme,</td>
<td>If all the world came to me,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mein Angst sie nicht wegnähme.</td>
<td>they could not take away my fear.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Image 10 Text and translation of the chorale “Auf meinen lieben Gott”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>6. Choral</th>
<th>6. Chorale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Auf meinen lieben Gott</td>
<td>In my dear God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trau ich in Angst und Not;</td>
<td>I trust in fear and need;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Er kann mich allzeit retten</td>
<td>He can save me always</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aus Trübsal, Angst und Nöten,</td>
<td>from trouble, terror and suffering,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mein Unglück kann er wenden,</td>
<td>He can turn aside my misfortune,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steht alls in seinen Händen.</td>
<td>since everything rests in His hands.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“Jesu meine Freude” (“Jesus, my joy”) was composed by Johan Crüger, 1653 and the text author was Johann Franck, 1650. It is the basis for Bach’s most famous motet (BWV 227). It is a five–part funeral piece. The six strophes of this hymn are separated by verses from Romans 8, forming a ritornello structure with striking symmetry. The motet is framed by identical plain harmonizations of the chorale melody, while the other odd numbered movements treat the same melody more freely.26

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### Text and translation of the chorale “Jesu meine Freude”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Chorale</th>
<th>1. Chorale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Jesu, meine Freude,</strong> meines Herzens Weide, Jesu, meine Zier! Ach wie lang, ach lange, ist dem Herzen bange und verlangt nach dir! Gottes Lamm, mein Bräutigam, außer dir soll mir auf Erden nichts sonst Liebers werden.</td>
<td><strong>Jesus, my joy,</strong> my heart’s pasture, Jesus, my treasure! Ah, how long, ah long has my heart suffered and longed for you! God's lamb, my bridegroom, besides You on earth nothing shall be dearer to me.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the chorale text “Aus tiefer Not schrei ich zu dir” ("Out of the Depths I Cry to You"), Bach uses the last sentence in the second verse in the Ciaccona. This is one of Martin Luther’s chorales from 1524, as well as Psalm 130. It also derived from Bach’s Cantata BWV 38. The words used in the Ciaccona are “Des will ich allzeit harren.”

### Text and translation of the chorale “Aus tiefer Not schrei ich zu dir”

| Aus tiefer Not schrei ich zu dir, Herr Gott, erhör mein Rufen; Dein gnädig Ohr neig her zu mir Und meiner Bitt sie öffne! Denn so du willt das sehen an, Was Sünd und Unrecht ist getan. | Out of deep anguish I call to You, Lord God, hear my cries; bow down Your gracious ear to me and open it to my plea! Since You behold, according to Your will, what sin and injustice is done. |

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Wer kann, Herr, vor dir bleiben?  who can stand, Lord, before You?

| Darum auf Gott will hoffen ich,  | Therefore I will hope in God,  |
| Auf mein Verdienst nicht bauen,  | and not rely on my merit,      |
| Auf ihn mein Herz soll lassen sich | I shall abandon my heart to Him |
| Und seiner Güte trauen,         | and trust in His goodness     |
| Die mir zusagt sein wertes Wort, | which His worthy Word has promised me; |
| Das ist mein Trost und treuer Hort, | that is my comfort and precious treasure, |
| **Des will ich allzeit harren.**  | **for which I shall wait always.** |

“Vom Himmel hoch da komm ich her,” opens the Ciaccona’s section in D–major. The text is by Martin Luther, 1539, and the music by Valentin Schumann, 1545. Bach used it around 1713-15. This chorale is from his so called “Orgelbüchlein” (little organ book) BWV 606. This is one of the most famous Christmas songs. He used it three times in the Christmas Oratorio: No.9, 17, 23.\(^3^0\)

The chorale “Wie soll ich dich empfangen” (“O Lord, How shall I meet You”) is connected to the chorale “Befiehl du deine Wege” (“Commit your path”). It is by the same author in the same year (Paul Gerhardt, 1653). However, the melody is slightly different (Images 13 and 14).\(^3^1\)

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Images 13 and 14 Different text and melody of the chorale “Befiehl du deine Wege”

**BWV 244/44 Befiehl du dein Wege**  
**Verse 1 of Paul Gerhardt’s (1653) “Befiehl du deine Wege”**

[Bach notation image]

Be - fiehl du de - ine We - ge und was dein Her - ze kränkt  

Der Wölk - en, Luft und Win - den gibt We - ge, Lauf und Bahn  
der wird auch We - ge fin - den, da dein Fuß ge - hen kann.

**BWV 248/5 Befiehl du deine Wege (I)**  
**Verse 1 of Paul Gerhardt’s (1653) “Wie soll ich dich empfangen”**

[Bach notation image]

Wie soll ich dich emp - fang - en und wie be-genn ich dir?  
O al - ler Welt Ver - lan - gen, o mei - ner See - len Zier!

O Jesu, Jesu, set - ze mir selbst die Fak - kel bei,  
da - mit was dich er - göt - ze, mir kund und wiss - send sei!
The text for “Jesu, deine Passion” is written by Sigismund von Birken, 1653, and the music composed by Melchior Vulpius, 1609. It is also known under a different text line: “Jesu, Leiden, Pein und Tod” (text by Paul Stockmann). The first time Bach uses it was in his “Weimar- Gotha” Passion, 1717 (chorale and Soprano aria=245a). Later he used it three times (with the different text) in the _St. John Passion_ (numbers 15a, 14, 32) as well as two times in the _St. Matthew Passion_ (numbers 3 and 7, with the text “Hertzliebster Jesu” (“Ah, Holy Jesus”), which probably is the most famous text associated with this melody)\(^3\) written by Johann Heermann.

Image 15 Text and translation of the chorale “Jesu, deine Passion”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jesu, deine Passion</th>
<th>Jesus, I will ponder now</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Will ich jetzt bedenken;</td>
<td>On Thy holy Passion;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wollest mir vom Himmelsthon</td>
<td>With Thy Spirit me endow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geist und Andacht schenken.</td>
<td>For such meditation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In dem Bild jetzund erschein,</td>
<td>Grant that I in love and faith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesu, meinem Herzen,</td>
<td>May the image cherish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wie du, unser Heil zu sein,</td>
<td>Of Thy suffering, pain, and death,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Littest alle Schmerzen!</td>
<td>That I may not perish.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“In meines Herzens Grunde” (“On my heart Your name”) was composed by Melchior Teschner, 1613, but he composed this melody over a different text, which was “Valet will ich dir geben” (“All Glory, Laud, and Honor”). Valerius Herberger was the

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author. Bach, on the contrary, used this chorale in several places: in his *St. John Passion* BWV 245 and with the other text “Valet, will ich dir geben” in his BWV 95.  

Image 16 Text and translation of the chorale “In meines Herzens Grunde”

| --- | --- |
| *In meines Herzens Grunde*  
Dein Nam und Kreuz allein  
Funkelt all Zeit und Stunde,  
Drauf kann ich fröhlich sein.  
Erschein mir in dem Bilde  
Zu Trost in meiner Not,  
Wie du, Herr Christ, so milde  
Dich hast geblut’ zu Tod! | *In the bottom of my heart*  
*Your name and Cross alone*  
*sparkles at all times and hours,*  
*for which I can be joyful.*  
Shine forth for me in that image  
as comfort in my need,  
how You, Lord Christ, so gently  
bled to death! |

The author of “Nun lob mein Seel den Herren” (“My Soul, Now Praise Your Maker!”) was Johann Gramann (Poliander), 1525. The first composer to use it was unknown. In comparison to other chorales, this one does not have a long history. Bach re-used this chorale several times, including in: BWV 17, 28, 29, 51, 167, and 225.  

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Image 17 Text and translation of the chorale “Nun lob, mein Seel, den Herren”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nun lob, mein Seel, den Herren,</th>
<th>Now praise, my soul, the Lord,</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Was in mir ist, den Namen sein!</td>
<td>whatever is in me, praise His name!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sein Wohltat tut er mehren,</td>
<td>He increases His good works continually,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vergiß es nicht, o Herze mein!</td>
<td>do not forget it, o my heart!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hat dir dein Sünd vergeben</td>
<td>He has forgiven you your sins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Und heilt dein Schwachheit groß,</td>
<td>and healed your great weakness,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Errett’ dein armes Leben,</td>
<td>rescued your meager life,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nimmt dich in seinen Schoß.</td>
<td>and taken you to His bosom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mit reichem Trost beschüttet,</td>
<td>He has protected you with lavish comfort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verjüngt, dem Adler gleich.</td>
<td>and rejuvenated, like the eagle.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Der Kön’g schafft Recht, behütet,</td>
<td>The King makes things right and protects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Die leid'n in seinem Reich.</td>
<td>those who suffer in His kingdom.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ciacconas and the Chorales, Analysis Part I

In the manuscript the last 14 measures of the Ciaccona are noted on a new page over three staves. Bach continued to write the third sonata’s Adagio in C–major right after on the same page. This is the only time Bach does that. It is the only time in the whole autograph of the “Sei Solo” that two separate works meet on one page. This way a conjunction of minor and major keys occurs. On this page the two chorale quotations meet: the Easter chorale “Christ lag in Todesbanden” (“Christ Jesus Lay in Death’s Strong Bands”) (d–minor), which concludes the Ciaccona as a cantus firmus, and the

Pentecost chorale “Komm, heiliger Geist, Herr Gott” (“Come, Holy Ghost, God and Lord”) (C–major), the melody to the cantus firmus of the Adagio and Fugue in C.37

The Ciaccona bears sacred vocals, which all testify to death and resurrection. The chorale quotation “Christ lag in Todesbanden” is in the Ciaccona as a hidden cantus firmus, which is accompanied throughout the 60 variations of the basso ostinato by their rich figurations.38 Bach uses the chorale’s first and last lines: “Christ lag in Todesbanden” and “Hallelujah.”

On the last bass note, where the word “Hallelu-jah” ends, the second verse begins. The words are: “Den Tod niemand zwingen kunnt” (“No one could defeat death”) and ends with the same last word “Hallelujah.” It is accompanied by a contrasting sharp dotted rhythm in the first variation and a descending chromatic affectus tristitiae (D C# C H Bb A). This bass line can symbolize pain, grief, sin, or death. The outer note–pairs of this lament bass (D C# and Bb A) are building the main motive of all the five movements of the d minor Partia. In the Ciaccona, this motive delineates the words “Den Tod, Den Tod/the death, the death” (D C#- Bb A). Bach integrates this motive to the Ciaccona probably from his Duet for Soprano and Alto (BWV 4).39

38 Ibid., 72.
39 Ibid., 103.
Example 1  Johann Sebastian Bach, Cantata BWV 4, Versus 2, Duet for Soprano and Alto, mm. 1–9.

In the last four notes of the chromatically descending line (mm.17, 18, 19), Bach engraved his name (C H B A= B A C H). This way he connected himself with the grief and death.  

Following the dotted–rhythm variation, in mm. 24-27 and 28-31, stabilized eighth- and sixteenth notes occur. The motive notes D-C#/ Bb-A (the outer notes of the chromatic line) in the bass line are now very visible at this point. The same chorale builds

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the cantus firmus again in these measures. In mm. 28-31 Bach’s articulation of slurs and broken 7th chords distinguish the inaudible chorale quotation even more.\textsuperscript{41}

In the next variation (variation 7, m. 32) the discant voice leads sequentially a half step down (mm. 32-35). It contains the six chromatic tones A-G#/ G-F#/ F-E. The six bass notes- D-C#-C-H-Bb-A build the same line at the same time. This means that both voices contain the \textit{affectus tristitiae}, the grief effect. And again Bach’s name appears in the bass line marked by the rhythmical figuration.\textsuperscript{42}

Example 2 Johann Sebastian Bach, Ciaccona from the d-minor Partia for Solo Violin, mm. 32–36.

\begin{center}
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{example2.png}
\end{center}

The next variation (variation 8, mm. 36-41) comprises six measures. In the continuous sixteenth-note motion, Bach again uses articulation slurs (mm.36/37), which distinguish D-C#/ Bb-A, the text part “the death, the death.” Thereafter, they build the accents for the double hemiolas (starting in m. 38), which accompany the cantus firmus

\textsuperscript{41}Helga Thoene, Johann Sebastian Bach Ciaccona: Tanz oder Tombeau[Ciaccona: Dance or Tombeau], (Oschersleben: dr. Zietthen Verlag, 2009): 106.

\textsuperscript{42}Ibid., 107.
“niemand zwingen kunnt.” The sum of the measures with the hemiolas, 38+39+40+41=158, is the equivalent number for Johann Sebastian Bach.43

The next variation is also six measures long (mm.42-47). It is characterized by ascending and descending scalar motions and long slurs. Adding the mm. 44+45+46+47 together, the sum of 182 results. This is the numeric value for Jesus Christus.44

In the next four variations (16 measures in total, starting in m. 48) contrasting figures are in opposition to each other. Over the first three measures, the sequenced legato scales fall until reaching the lowest note on the violin, and then re-ascended with A–major triads in the fourth measure. In the following variations the broken triad chords (d–minor, C–major, Bb–major) jump up to E6 through an A–major triad. Those two variations swirl around the chorale melody “Dein Wille gescheh, Herr Gott, zugleich” (“Your will be done, Lord God, likewise”), and the next variation completes the rest of the text: “auf Erden wie im Himmelreich” (“on earth as in heaven”).

Both minor parts of the Ciaccona contain the chorale quotation “Dein Wille gescheh, Herr Gott, zugleich auf Erden wie im Himmelreich.” This church hymn receives therefore, a symmetrical disposition. In the wide ranging “heights” and “depths” the figurations within the variations (a span of two octaves) seem to have a direct reference

44 Ibid., 109.
to the text “auf Erden wie im Himmelreich” (“on earth as in heaven”). The motive D-C# and Bb-A is clearly presented in higher as well as in the lower registers.45

Example 3 Johann Sebastian Bach, Ciacona from the d-minor Partia for Solo Violin, mm. 48–51.

“Wo soll ich fliehen hin...” (“Where shall I flee...”) is designated by thirty-second–note figurations, which seem to run in different directions (mm. 64–75). The switch from legato to the non-legato suggests the impression of a sudden haste and rush. The D C# / Bb A motive spans over the whole variation.46


46 Ibid., 112.
Example 4  Johann Sebastian Bach, Ciaccona from the d-minor Partia for Solo Violin, mm. 64–67.

In the mm. 76–80, where the up–and–down chord progression is based on the fundamental notes D C Bb A, the diminished–seventh chords define the chromatic lament line. The first four chords allocate the rising A Bb H C notes, while the notes H C Bb A on the downbeats (mm 77, 78, 79) are arranged like a cross (Image 22). 47 The whole step five-note line (A G F E D) is identical with the “Hallelujah” from the chorale quotation “Den Tod niemand zwingen kunnt.”

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Example 5  Johann Sebastian Bach,  Ciaccona from the d-minor Partia for Solo Violin, mm. 76–80.

The next three measures (80-82) allegorize a very enigmatic sequence. Noticeable is the writing of strong dissonant chord progressions. Bb G# F D H/ A F# Eb C/ G Eb C# Bb. To play those chords on the violin at the same time is impossible, but also the strong dissonances would be very painful to the ear, especially in the baroque era. From m. 83 onward, a bridge passage appears, but is connected to the previous section through their sum 80+81+82+83= 326. According to Thoene, this sum is also equivalent to the biblical citation “Ecce Agnus Dei Qui Tollit Peccata Mundi,” in translation “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (Jn 1:29). These ascending thirty–seconds swirl into the highest heights (on the baroque violin these were the highest notes), perhaps they supposed to mean a redeemed soul.\(^{48}\)

The arpeggio section (mm. 88-119) is thirty-two measures long, which is quite a long period in comparison to the previous sections. Here a whole round dance of chorale quotations begins. Within the first measure Bach predetermined the way he wants these chords to be played. The three–and four–voiced chords represent a great happiness. The upper discant voice in the first arpeggio variation (mm. 88-91) is the melody from the chorale “Jesu meine Freude” (“Jesus, Priceless Treasure”). This melody is very easy to determine. The quotation “Jesu, meine Freude” with its word “Freude” (“joy”) is symbolized by a sudden accelerating alteration of chord notes in eighth–note motion (m. 91). The tone number equivalence of the first measure is number 41, which relates to J.S. Bach.49

The subsequent variation (mm. 92-95) contains in the lower voice the melody from the chorale “Befiehl du deine Wege” (“Entrust your Way”) which is connected to the pickup of the previous variation “Jesu mein Freund” (“Jesus, Priceless Treasure”), but is two octaves higher. The next three–voiced chords (mm. 96-99) contain in the lower voice the melody of “Auf meinen lieben Gott-” (“In my dear God-”) in a rising scale form. But only after a four measure break does the rest of the text—“trau ich in angst und Not” (“I trust in fear and need”) appear. Disconnected are these quotations by the

reappearing chorale quotation “Den Tod niemand zwingen kunnt”. Those are going along in unison with the words “in Angst und Not” (“in fear and need”).

The next arpeggio variation (mm. 108-119) is characterized by a continuous chromatic progression. While in the discant the notes F F# G G# A are sounded, the middle voices are accompanied by the A Bb H C motive. The lower voice repeats, canon–like, the sequence E F F# G G# A. These four measures go simultaneously in a rising triple chromatic motion until the peak in m. 112. This number is the gematric value for CHRISTUS. A repetitive quotation follows “Gib uns Geduld in Leidenszeit” (“Grant us patience in time of sorrow”). The word “patience” goes along with the rising A-B-H-C, and “suffering” with the falling C-H-B-A. It looks like Bach puts his secret signature there and it interacts with the hidden melody text. This is his personal suffering time.

The end of the thirty-two measure long arpeggio section determines (in a low register and as in a confirmation) the chorale quotation “Des will ich allzeit harren” (“for which I shall wait always”). This is the last line of the chorale “Darum auf Gott will hoffen ich” (“Therefore I will hope in God”). This quotation follows right on the last two tones of the previous chorale in the lower voice, and the motive H C Bb A is integrated again.

50 Helga Thoene, Johann Sebastian Bach Ciaccona: Tanz oder Tombeau [Ciaccona: Dance or Tombeau], (Oschersleben: dr. Ziethen Verlag, 2009): 118.

51 Ibid., 119.

52 Ibid.
The melody of “Befiehl du deine Wege” (“ Entrust your Ways”) marks the strong beats of the mm. 119-123. The word “ways” runs in ambiguous ways, and the slurred thirty-seconds lead into a cadence in m. 123. The gematric number of that measure is 182= Jesus Christus. In this measure all the “ways” end. The first part of the Ciaccona concludes with the repetition of the core chorale quotations “Christ lag in Todesbanden” and its corresponding “Hallelujah.”

Analysis Part II

The D-major middle section of the Ciaccona is controlled by variations, which contain glorious major-triad arpeggios. These are stated with rhythmic prominence and drum like repetitive effects, which occur even stronger with the doubling unison chords. At this point, the violin is supposed to imitate brass and timbale instruments (mm. 160-176), whose signals can be understood as announcement of the “King’s reign.” They may also refer to the “Last Judgment”– with “Fanfare and timbale.”

In the first four measures of the major part, before the “signal” happens, there is a holy call-out: “Sanctus- Sanctus- Sanctus.” This is the result of the total of 23 notes (over the first four measures). This number refers to the liturgical “Quoniam Tu Solus

Helga Thoene, Johann Sebastian Bach Ciaccona: Tanz oder Tombeau (Ciaccona: Dance or Tombeau), (Oschersleben: dr. Ziethen Verlag, 2009): 120.

Ibid., 126.
Sanctus.” This middle major part refers probably to the “Elysian” D–major section, while the d–minor part refers to the “Earth.” Very often Bach associated numbers like 3 with the holy Trinity, as well as major key with joy and happiness. On the contrary, the numbers 2 and 4 represent humanity and earth, as does the minor mode.

Example 6  Johann Sebastian Bach, Ciaccona from the d-minor Part for Solo Violin, mm. 132–136.

Interspersed throughout the major part is the chorale melody “Vom Himmel hoch da komm ich her” (“From Heaven Above”). This Christmas chorale refers to the birth of Christ. Perhaps this has to be understood as a Parusia (or resurrection), or maybe an indication of the “Last Judgment”? The same chorale reappears one more time in the next minor part, visible in mm. 238, 239, and 240, which is like a recollection, but with intensified tone sequence at the end of variation 57. While occurring the first time, a chorale “Wie soll ich dich empfangen” (“O Lord, How Shall I Meet You”) interposes in

between (mm. 136/137), as well as another one “Jesu, deine Passion will ich jetzt bedenken” (“Jesus, I will ponder now Oh Thy holy Passion”) (mm. 144-148).\textsuperscript{56}

After the first minor part of the Ciaccona, where the \textit{affectus tristitiae} dominates—“den tod niemand zwingen kunnt”—the glance now goes “heavenwards” in the major part. Turning away from his own “suffering,” Bach now reaches the observation point of Christ’s sufferings: “Jesu, deine Passion will ich jetzt bedenken.” For the actual peak, this passion chorale appears in this part with longer lines, which is reached in variation 39, from mm. 160-176. Great major arpeggios occur here repetitively, emulating a timbale. The open strings A and D add a brilliant effect due to their resonance. The imitation of fanfares and timbales escalate even further by adding to the double stops three–voiced chords. The harmonization on each measure of the chorale “Vom Himmel hoch da komm ich her” reappears, and gets affirmed through the repeated “da komm ich her.”\textsuperscript{57}

After these sixteen measures (160-176), with their signal–like effects, the measures after 176 follow in a clear affect change, which is defined by suspensions and descending motions in the eight notes on the strong down beats. In m. 180, in tightly sequenced descending eight notes, the melody “Wie soll ich dich empfangen” (“O Lord, How Shall I Meet You”) occurs: F# B A G F# E F#. The same notes appear over a larger span of time until m. 184. Those are set in counterpointed by the “Da komm ich her” (D E F# G). While performing, one should go toward m. 182, which is again, the numeric

\textsuperscript{56}Helga Thoene, \textit{Johann Sebastian Bach Ciaccona: Tanz oder Tombeau} (Ciaccona: Dance or Tombeau), (Oschersleben: dr. Ziethe Verlag, 2009): 129.

\textsuperscript{57}Ibid., 130.
number for Jesus Christus. In this particular measure, the only four–voiced chord, which is ranging over two octaves, takes place. Here, the two chorales “Da komm ich her” and “Wie soll ich dich empfangen” meet together.58

The next passage from 185-208, which is 24 measures long, is subdivided in three groups of eight measures. The first two show a three– and four–voiced chord progression, the same rhythmical motion as at the beginning of the Ciaccona. In the first eight measures the upper melody line shows a quotation of the chorale “In meines Herzens Grunde Dein Nam’ und Kreuz allein” (“On my heart Your name and cross alone”); the same one continues to sound in the next following eight measures, just an octave higher with the continuation of the text “Funkelt allzeit und Stunde” (“sparkles all the time and hour”). Then it returns back to the lower register with the next line of the chorale “Drauf kann ich Froehlich sein” (“This I can be happy”). Both chorale lines are accompanied by an uneven bass pattern. The first line moves on a descending tetra chord D C B A. The second however, is based on a partially chromatic ascending line of D E F# G G# A. The following eight measures (200-208) show a slightly different bass line. This second arpeggio passage of the Ciaccona represents “great joy” again. It goes along with the inaudible repeated text line in the discant voice “Darauf kann ich Froehlich sein” (“This I can be happy”). With this quotation, the middle part of the Ciaccona ends. Interspersed in the alternating voices of the arpeggios (eighth–note motion), a canon like “Hallelujah” can be assumed. This “Hallelujah” version exists in the church chorale “Wachet auf, ruft

uns die Stimme‖ (―Wake, Awake, for Night is flying‖). As a supplement, in the lower voice the melody of the chorale “Dem Hoechsten sei Lob, Ehr’ und Preis” appears.\(^59\)

**Analysis Part III**

The last part of the three–part Ciaccona, after concluding the major part with four–voice arpeggios, returns back to the d–minor key (m. 208). Here, some very emotional and expressive figurations, simulating a prayer, hide the chorale line “Nun lob mein Seel den Herren” (―My Soul, Now Praise Your Maker!‖) in Bb–major (in the first eight measures). The notes of this chorale appear on the strong down beats. With the only four–voiced chord, the first syllable (“Her-ren/Lo-rd”) is emphasized. The second half of that word is delayed and happens after suspensions on Eb C# and D.\(^60\)

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\(^60\) Ibid., 134.
Example 7  Johann Sebastian Bach, Ciaccona from the d-minor Partia for Solo Violin, mm. 212–215.

In the wide–ranged figurations of the mm. 216–228, the two lines from the chorale quotation “Dein Will gescheh, Herr Gott, zugleich auf Erden wie im Himmelreich” are represented. This is a repeated quotation from the Ciaccona’s first part. This quotation lays over the ascending bass notes; D D, E E , F F, G, hidden each within these measures. The descending passage from m. 220 leads over the C H/ Bb A notes up to the violins lowest note G. “Auf Erden wie im Himmelreich” might be represented in the texture by the upward scalar motions. Their peak may be in the floating figurations in the discant voice (m. 226).61

The next twelve measures revolve around the pedal tone A, which sounds six times in each measure with its interlaced six–tone lament bass (affectus tristitiae). This lament bass happens twice (A G# G F# F E/ G F# F E Eb D). The third time the line goes in the opposite direction (E F F# G G# A). It arouses the impression of death chimes. Most likely the violin imitates death bells. The melody “Vom Himmel hoch da komm ich

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her” remains in the background, even though it marks the down beats in the first four measures, and near the end of this section in the lower voice in a tighter tone sequence.62

With the resuming of the Easter chorale “Christ lag in Todesbanden” the Partita’s movement is successfully framed. The descending bass line (D C Bb A G) refers to the text line “Hallelujah,” and with the notes A G F E D again in the last three measures. Against the notation rules, Bach writes out the whole last measure (not cutting of the last beat due to “pick up” to the beginning of the Ciaccona).63

Maria Barbara Bach

The exact date of Maria Barbara Bach’s death is unknown, but certain evidence proves that when Bach returned home from his trip with the prince of Anhalt to Karlsbaden (May-July 1720), he found his wife dead and already buried. When he left the house in May 1720, his wife was in good health, and he would not even know about her illness and death until his return home. Maria Barbara and Johann Sebastian had five children together: Catharina Dorothea (1708), Wilhelm Friedemann (1710), Carl Philipp


63 Ibid.
Emanuel (1714), and Johann Gottfried Bernhard (1715). Another child born in 1718 died a year later.\textsuperscript{64}

As seen in the chorales, numerology can play a significant role. By calculating Maria Barbara’s full name, the result adds up to 95 (Image 18a).

Image 18a Helga Thoene, Johann Sebastian Bach’s Ciaconna, page 77

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{cccccccc}
12 & 1 & 17 & 9 & 1 & 2 & 1 & 17 & 2 & 1 & 17 & 1 & 2 & 1 & 3 & 8 \\
40 & 41 & 14 & 95
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

The notes within the first one–and–a–half measures of the Ciaconna add up to 17 notes total. The next half of the phrase has 20 notes. These numbers, 17 and 20, can be interpreted as the year of Maria Barbara’s death (1720). Coming back to the first phrase, by adding the numerological value of these 17 notes we end up having a total number of 95, which (see above) refers to her full name.\textsuperscript{65}

\textsuperscript{64} Helga Thoene, Johann Sebastian Bach Ciaconna: Tanz oder Tombeau[Ciaconna: Dance or Tombeau], (Oschersleben: dr. Ziethen Verlag, 2009): 77.

\textsuperscript{65} Ibid., 88.
Her name, as well as the names of their children, are represented several times throughout this monumental work. Since the same melody concludes the Ciaccona, her name also frames the entire work, going along with the chorale “Christ lag in Todesbanden.” Therefore, many would agree, that the Ciaconna probably is a memorial to her.
Did Bach certainly know how to use numerology, and did he really mean to apply that in his works? No one can answer this with certainty. “The lack of historical evidence of the use of compositional numbers seems extraordinary in view of the quantity of writing on Bach and number symbolism.” According to Smend, Bach most likely should be aware of discussion among German theorists at that time about the _loci topici_. “The _loci topici_ became popular as devices for generating philosophical and rhetorical arguments in the early 16\(^{th}\) century, and were also applied to poetry and music. The classification of loci species varied from author to author.” Bach knew the two men (Neumeister, and Hunold), and was probably familiar with their publication (1707), but there is no proof that Bach used the paragram technique to innovate in music. Also, Bach was a member of a society, which was founded by Mizler in 1738, where composers could discuss everything about music. Having all this in mind, “a separation must be maintained between numerical analysis, comment upon the compositional process and speculative interpretation of the numbers. There is also a need to consider whether there is any historical justification for the analytical techniques used to generate the numbers; and if so, whether the numbers in the score were created consciously by the


67 Ibid.

68 Ibid., 233.

69 Ibid.
composer and whether the numbers are wholly structural or have some further significance."

A very important issue in learning Bach’s sonatas and partias is the broader knowledge of Bach’s works in general, in order to understand his style better and to be able to search and find one’s own way toward a deeper interpretation. It is not enough just to listen to these works. One has to be able to analyze and comprehend the meaning. One will learn to grasp not just the majesty, depth of thought and sense, but also the severe logic throughout the smallest details of musical and harmonic structure. After hearing and playing the Ciaconna together with the chorales, it is impossible to hear it without those anymore. It appears to be a completely different understanding, and opens up a different world, the world of Bach’s genius mind and capability to put so much sense and tricky technique features on top of such a mastery already known and esteemed over centuries.

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Bibliography


http://www.emmanuelmusic.org/notes_translations/nt_notes_transl_cantatas.htm#pab1_7


