Sources of influence on Johann Mattheson's ideas on Musical Expression

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Everything [in music] that occurs without praiseworthy Affections, is nothing, does nothing, is worth nothing. (Johann Mattheson (1681-1764), Der vollkommene Capellmeister, 1739, 146)

However one defines the mathematical relationships of sounds and their qualities, no real connection with the passions of the soul can ever be drawn from this alone. For besides natural science and pure philosophy, other arts are needed here, moral and rhetorical relationships. (Johann Mattheson, Der vollkommene Capellmeister, 1739, 50)

Although Johann Mattheson never attempted to construct a Doctrine of the Affections (Affektenlehre) or a standardized code for musical composition for the purpose of expressing the Affections, there is no doubt that Mattheson was, in comparison with writers on music before and in his own time, the clearest exponent of ideas on musical expression.¹

Throughout his influential Der vollkommene Capellmeister, the identification of the Affections in music became the crucial element in the delineation of his philosophical ideals. According to Mattheson, the aesthetic aim of all kinds of musical practices, whether dealing with text setting, instrumentation, writing in a particular dance movement or performing a song, etc., was to arouse the Affects in the listener. To Mattheson, music was first and foremost an expressive, sensuous art. The ear determined all aspects of musical qualities, and no rules can contradict the sense. Yet music, to be understood and appreciated on an

¹ According to Buelow, no 18th-century theorist other than Mattheson ever used the term Affektenlehre, and Mattheson used it only three times: once in Critica Musica II, p. 324 (1722), once in Musicalischer Patriot III (1728), and once in Der vollkommene Capellmeister I, iii; in each case, the reference was to Descartes's study of the human Passions. While Mattheson put much more emphasis on developing a rationalized framework for musical expression and composition, there is no evidence to suggest that he attempted to postulate a universal doctrine of the Affections.
intellectual and ethical level, was also a rational art. Holding that “the prime, established bases of music lie in physics or natural science,” Mattheson believed that to be moved by music is to understand music. To better understand the manifold of his musical ideals, this paper will present some major sources of influence on Mattheson's ideas on the Affections. Contributive ideas from his predecessors and contemporaries will be discussed to provide a historical account of Mattheson’s musical thoughts. In the end, I will discuss uniqueness of the nature of Mattheson's ideas about musical expression that was to become an aesthetic foundation of the late eighteenth century.

Before beginning the discussion of Mattheson’s sources of influence on his ideas on musical expression, it is necessary to understand the historical accounts of the usage of “Affection” and “Passion.” While the two terms were used synonymously in Mattheson’s time to signify a a rationalized emotional state, they carry subtle contrast in terms of philosophical orientation (i.e., ethical vs. rational). The word “Affection” is rooted in the Latin verb *adficere*, meaning to influence or to put someone in a certain state. Originally it was a translation of the Greek *pathos*, to which philosophers and moralists of antiquity generally refer for ethical purposes. Aristotle, in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, states that the human soul is conditioned by “desire, anger, fear, daring, envy, gratification, friendliness, hatred, longing, jealousy, pity and in general all states of mind that are attended by pleasure and pain.” For him, the important thing is to be affected by these feelings at the right moment for legitimate reasons. The word “Passion” derives from the Latin *passio*, signifying suffering or agony. In the High German of the Middle Ages the borrowed Latin word *passio* referred to the history of Christ's suffering. This can be seen in the tradition of Christ's Passion being set to music well into the eighteenth century. In the latter part of the seventeenth century, the primacy of this religious meaning began to decline. In Antoine Furetière’s *Universal Dictionary* of 1690, “Passion”
was redefined in a physical term as “a natural body relative to and opposed to an action, or one that suffers the intervention of an agent.”

It is only in the context of this second definition of “Passion” as physical suffering, that the original Christological meaning was found. This redefinition of passion in terms of physical action and rational agency was based on Rene Descartes's (1596-1950) rationalist account in his *Les passions de l’âme* (Paris and Amesterdam, 1649), which will be later discussed.

Standing on the crossroads of stylistic influences of the 17th and 18th centuries, Mattheson was preoccupied with the question of musical expression throughout his life. His concern with the Affections was explicit in his first musical treatise *Das neu-eröffnete Orchestre* of 1713 (part III, chapter II), where he ascribed affective characteristics to each of seventeen major and minor keys. In his *Das forschende Orchestre* of 1721, he examined the Affections in the context of sense and experience, and identified the sense of hearing as the most powerful of all the senses since “through hearing, the mind and its Affections are most powerfully aroused.”

Mattheson's discussion of the Affections in *Critica Musica* (a series of periodical issued by Mattheson between 1722 and 1725) was even more elaborate. To Mattheson, melody was the primary “carrier” of the Affections and excessive counterpoint lessened affective impact. With respect to dense polyphonic writing, Mattheson commented that the combination of four or more melodies “confuse, darken, glue-up the main point, the

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3 “Many theorists, beginning in the Renaissance with the revived interest in Greek concepts of *ethos*, had attempted to define keys according to specific affects. Glareanus (*Dodecachordon*, 1547) was one of the first to define the twelve modes according to their affection, and Zarlino (*Istitutioni Harmoniche*, 1558) suggested similar affective power for the modes. Mersenne (*Harmonie Universelle*, 1636), Kircher (*Mursurgia Universalis*, 1650) and Werckmeister (*Harmonologica Musica* 1702) all attribute Affections to keys, but the most comprehensive catalogue of key Affections appears in Johann Mattheson’s first published treatise, *Das Neu-eröffnete Orchestre* (1713), part III, chapter II.” (George J. Buelow, *Thorough-bass accompaniment according to Johann David Heinichen* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), 284.)
main modulation, and the affection.”\textsuperscript{5}

While the above works contain partial statements of Mattheson's musical thoughts, his philosophical framework on musical expression and theoretical concepts was best developed and completely stated in \textit{Der vollkommence Capellmeister} (Hamburg, 1739). An encyclopedic work presenting a vast array of facts covering fundamental historical and rudimentary matters of performance and the craft of composition, the \textit{Capellmeister} was designed for the training of every \textit{Kapellmeister} (i.e. musical director in a church, municipal or court musical establishment.) In the chapter entitle “On the Things which One Must Learn Beforehand and Take as a Foundation before Proceeding to the Matter Itself,” Mattheson defined “Music is the science and the art of cleverly arranging, correctly combining, and delightfully performing both artful and pleasant sounds, so that the glory of God and all virtues are furthered through their euphony.”\textsuperscript{6} This definition reflected a diversified approach to the understanding of music. Mattheson postulated a system of four kinds of musical functions, and hence four discrete areas of study: (1) the "natural" - the domain of acoustics (the phenomenal basis of sound); (2) the "moral" - the domain of affect and style (the particular psychology of music); (3) the "rhetorical" - the domain wherein are studied the performative and grammatical aspects of musical composition; and (4) the "mathematical" - the traditional theorization of musical material,\textsuperscript{7} and argued that these areas were to be studied for the purpose of expressing the Affections, since “everything [in music] that occurs without praiseworthy Affections, is nothing, does nothing, is worth nothing.”\textsuperscript{8}

Reacting against the practice of the traditional Lutheran \textit{Cantorei} which emphasized the

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\textsuperscript{5} Ibid., 113.
\textsuperscript{8} \textit{Capellmeister}, 146.
mathematical understanding of music for the purpose of musical expression, Mattheson argued that “however one defines the mathematical relationships of sounds and their qualities, no real connection with the passions of the soul can ever be drawn from this alone.” With respect to musical judgements, Mattheson asserted the primacy of sensus, and in particular indentified the sense of hearing as the most powerful of all the senses. Mattheson’s belief in the empirical nature of music, as best represented by his statement “Mathematics is a human skill; nature, however, is a divine force,” is constructed on the empirical theory of the English philosopher John Locke (1632-1704). According to Locke’s Essay Concerning Human Understanding of 1689 (of which Mattheson gave a German translation,) the human mind is a “blank slate” (tabula rasa) waiting to receive the imprint of experience; knowledge is attained only through experience - and experience in turn is obtained by the exercise of our senses and that which is discovered by means of the senses. Locke identified sound as one of the many “simple modes of simple ideas of sensation” where hearing is the sense by which ideas are received into the mind:

The like variety have we in sounds. Every articulate word is a different modification of sound; by which we see that, from the sense of hearing, by such modifications, the mind may be furnished with distinct ideas, to almost an infinite number. Sounds also, besides the distinct cries of birds and beasts, are modified by diversity of notes of different length put together, which make that complex idea called a tune, which a musician may have in his mind when he hears or makes no sound at all, by reflecting on the ideas of those sounds, so put together silently in his own fancy.

Mattheson stated that it was his intention to teach how to create music “which would through

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9 Ibid., 50.
10 Ibid., 54.
the instrument of the ears please the sense of hearing which dwells in the soul, and would thoroughly move or stir the heart of soul.”

Therefore to Mattheson it was not an external or physical sense of hearing that was of ultimate importance in musical perception, but an internal sense, which had its ultimate sources in the soul. He also claimed that the “pleasure of hearing in itself” in fact “inclines the soul to virtue”, thus integrating an ancient concern into his modern theory in a fashion consistent with empiricism. In fact, his belief that the ear resides in the soul derived from the traditional German faith in the immediate affectiveness of music. Like Luther, Mattheson held the ear to be a special sense; the other senses serve only the body: “The eyesight, the sense of smell, the sense of taste and the sense of touch serve the body; but only the sense of hearing is reserved for the soul and our morals.”

Thus Mattheson partook of the traditional German view that there was a “secret affinity” whereby well-ordered sounds would impart their harmony to sympathize the human soul, but he roundly rejected the number mysticism frequently associated with this view.

In applying sensory experience to the understanding of the Affections, Mattheson stated that a musician must have an equally proportioned mixture of the humours (a well-balanced character), in order to feel the Affections in intensity. This concept was borrowed from Anthanasius Kircher’s application of the ancient Greek medical theory of the four humours in understanding of musical impact on the human character in his influential *Musurgia Universalis* of 1650. The ancient teaching of the temperaments were largely formulated by Empedocles (490–430 ca. B.C.E), Hippocrates (ca. 460–ca. 377 B.C.E) Galen (129–ca. 200 C.E). These theories helped explain the physio-psychological process of the body producing from one Affection to another. As Kircher has it, thus, there are four fundamental humours,

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13 Capellmeister, 90.
14 Ibid., 60.
15 Capellmeister, 99.
such as blood, phlegm, black and yellow bile. Distillations of these four humors make up the spirits (i.e. physical, vital and animal spirits.) The spirits are produced in the organs through the power of the four qualities: heat, dryness, humidity and cold. The qualities derive their powers from the four elements: heat from fire, dryness from air, wetness from water, and cold from earth. Any loosening in the proportionate distribution of these elements in the human body, one of them having the preponderance over the others, may result in four different types of temperament, those of sanguine, phlegmatic, melancholic and choleric; a healthy person enjoys a balance of the humors, hence an even temperament.

According to Kircher, the animal spirits (a certain very thin air or wind distilled in the brain that travels in the nerves and controls the feelings and activates and bodily movements) depended on the humors but could also modulate their composition according to impulses from the external environment. To explain how this occurs, he identified air as the medium between sound and the senses. The agitation of the animal spirits in listening to music was then directly correlated with the intensity of air vibration and the sympathy between the music and the listener’s temperament:

At first the harmonic number stirs the intrinsic air and imprints harmonic movements upon it. Then this triggers the phantasy, which in turn arouses the vaporous humours that are mixed with the intrinsic air or spirit. Finally the humours incline man to the object they refer to. This is the way, and no other, in which harmony moves the passions.

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16 “According to Kircher, they [i.e. the sound and the senses] interact because there is one material element that is common to both sides - air. Man’s principle of life, that which keeps him functioning as an organism, is air (breath, aēr, spiritus). The air that resides in man (aēr intrinsecus implantatus) vibrates perpetually in accordance with his basic temperament or elemental proportions. Now, music exists also through the medium of air. Sounds commence as vibrations in the air outside of man (aēr extrinsecus). The crucial interaction takes place when the musical vibrations (motus harmonici) of the aēr extrinsecus merge with the aēr intrinsecus and thereby put their imprint on man’s internal proportions.” (Benito V. Rivera, *German Music Theory in the Early 17th-Century: The Treatises of Johannes Lippius* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI Research Press, 1980), 34.)

17 Ibid., 34.
Therefore each temperament resonates with its corresponding musical characteristics. The closer the ratio of harmonies to the natural circulating frequency of the animal spirits, the better air and animal spirits harmonize, thereby intensifying the aroused Affect.

Melancholic people like grace, solid and sad harmony; sanguine persons prefer the hyporchematic style of dance music because it agitates the blood; choleric people like agitated harmonies because of the vehemence of their swollen gall; martially inclined men are partial to trumpets and drums, and they reject all delicate and pure music; phlegmatic persons lean toward women’s voices because their high-pitched voice has a benevolent effect on phlegmatic humor. [Musurgia universalis I:544]

Basically, expansions or accelerations of the animal spirit produce symptoms of joy, their contractions or decelerations sadness. This medical theory of the humours was used by Mattheson to support his empirical stance. Regarding the healing powers of music, Mattheson stated critically that the Capellmeister should have the relevant empirical experience in order to create the correct Affection in their work:

Since all naturalists are also certain that music can not infrequently take place of medicine because of its natural harmony or concord; it therefore behooves a prospective Capellmeister, or one who is already in office, to consider everything thoroughly concerning this, and to separate the true from the false through actually examination or experimentation.

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18 “Kircher begins his treatment of the affections with a summary of traditional humoural theory. The vapors from the four humors mix in various proportions according to the objects of the imagination. If the object is full of indignation or jealousy, the spirits and the vapors from the gall bladder, mobilized by the imaginative force, acquire the temperament of warmth and dryness and drive the soul into affections of anger, fury, and rage. An object that is agreeable and full of love causes sanguineous vapors from the liver to become warm and humid; agitated by soft and harmonious movements, they sweetly and tenderly move the soul to taste joy, hope, confidence, love and cheer. If the objects is terrifying, sad, and tragic, the vapors rising from the receptacle of black bile endow the animal spirit with a cold and dry temperament, subjecting the soul to melancholy, sorrow, pain, lamentation, and similar affections; A delicate, smooth, and moderate object, neither sad nor joyous, causes the vapors to become cold and humid, and the animal spirits impel the soul to passions of cheerfulness, calm, confidence, and noble love.” (Claude V. Palisca, Music and Ideas in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press), 194.)

19 Capellmeister, 102.
In outlining his musical representation of the Affections, Mattheson writes “the experts on nature know how to describe the manner in which our Affections actually and so to speak physically function, and it is of great advantage to a composer if he also is not inexperienced in this.” Thus, Mattheson is content to leave the physiological details of the theory to scientists. For the rational theory of the Affections, Mattheson is indebted to Descartes's *Les passions de l’âme* (1650).

In his treatise *Les passions de l’âme*, Descartes explained the physical bases of emotion by providing lists of the Affections classified according to the humours of the body, where he believed the Affections originated. Descartes proposed that the passions differ from other perceptions (i.e. smell, touch, etc.) in that they are said to originate neither in the external objects that act upon the senses nor in the body, but rather in the soul itself.

To explain that the passions occur in the soul, Descartes applies traditional physiology of the animal spirits (*esprits animaux*). Descartes believed that the soul receives its feelings through the movements of the animal spirits - a certain very thin air or wind that travels in the nerves and the brain, tiny tubelike filaments, conveying the impressions of the senses and controlling the body’s muscular movements (Art.7). While retaining the traditional theory of the animal spirits to explain the cause of the passions, Descartes went further to adapt this traditional theory to the newly discovered circulation of the blood: he proposed the novel theory that while only the thin animal spirits can enter the brain’s minute pores, through which they reach the nerves, the denser components of the blood flow speedily everywhere else (Art. 10). In an unprecedented way, Descartes identified the pineal gland, an unpaired organ in the middle of the brain, as the communication center to which all the nerves lead and from which the animal spirits are distributed to the appropriate parts of the body (Art. 35).
The cause of the passions is the agitation that the animal spirits on the pineal gland. This agitation produces an immediate reaction on the part of the body; the body affects the soul, disposing it toward certain affective states. The soul experiences passively the movements of the spirits as Affections or perceptions (Art. 27), and has little control over the actions and representations that cause the passions, which persist as long as their cause remains present. The persistence of a given passion is due to lingering animal spirits which fortify and perpetuate it. The will cannot stop them but only resist some of their effects, such as denying an urge to violence aroused by hate (Art. 46.)

Descartes provided a dialectical analysis of the source and functions of the Passions and described in some detail what he considered to be the six principal Passions - “admiration, love, hate, desire, joy, and sadness” - together with the 35 secondary Passions derived from these. Like Descartes and other contemporary philosophers, Mattheson thought the Passions existed either as virtues or as vices. Both types were capable of musical expression, but only through the virtuous Affections could the soul be healed: “Where there is no passion, no affection, neither is there virtue. If our passions are sick, then they must be healed, not murdered.”

Descartes’s rational theory of the Passions provided Mattheson with a scientific justification for his Affective theories: “since for example joy is an expression of our soul, thus it follows reasonably and naturally that I could best express this affect by large and expanded intervals. Whereas if one knows that sadness is a contraction of these subtle parts of our body, then it is

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20 Capellmeister, 104.
easy to see that the small and smallest intervals are the most suitable for this passion.”

In addition, Descartes’s account of the Passions offered a physiological ground that is superior to the traditional mathematical foundation of musical expression in that it enabled composers to “depict in a highly natural way and in numberless diversity love, jealousy, hatred, gentleness, impatience, horror, dignity, baseness, splendor, despair, storm, tranquility, even heaven, earth, sea, hell.”

The sources presented thus far have demonstrated an admixture of intellectual currents underlying Mattheson’s ideas on musical expression. These sources were based on unparallel, or even opposing philosophical premises: Kircher’s humoral theory was based on his mathematic understanding of music; Locke’s understanding of the sensory experience was clearly in contrast with the Descartes’s rational understanding of the Passions. The eclecticism of Mattheson’s ideas on musical expression could partly be explained by the diversity of his education and professional experiences. But there is no doubt that Mattheson, standing in opposite position against the sterile academicism of the Lutheran Cantorei, has carefully combined theories to serve the aim of his philosophy – to advance the cause of musical craft in Germany. His theories of expression were both intellectually appealing to the Lutheran readers for its emphasis on the moral aspects of the Affections and sophisticated for its scientific justification. As history revealed, the impact of Mattheson’s musical ideas on

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21 Ibid., 104.
23 “His earliest musical training was through private teachers in Hamburg and at the Johanneum, where he received the typical preparation in Lutheran church music. Although he never attended a university, he referred to the Hamburg opera, where he was active for some nine years as singer, composer, and director, as a “musical university…” He retired from Hamburg opera in 1705, as a cultivated man of the world, proficient in languages, dance, fencing, as well as organ-playing … He entered [in 1703] the employ of the English envoy to lower Saxony fist as tutor, then as secretary … In 1715 he was appointed cantor and canon o the Hamburg Cathedral. From 1713 on he was engaged in a critical duel of his own making with the adherents of the old musical theory and the opponents of the new music. And after becoming deaf in 1728 his musical energies were directed more and more to writing and musical journalism.” (Bellamy Hosler, Changing Aesthetic Views of Instrumental Music in 18th-Century Germany (Ann Arbor, Mich: UMI Research Press, 1981), 71.
musical expression on the changing aesthetic status of the late eighteenth century was inestimable.\textsuperscript{24}

\textsuperscript{24} “During the course of the eighteenth century, the need to have personally experienced the Affection was increasingly emphasized to the point that, at the dawn of Empfindsamkeit, experience rather than rational knowledge of the affection was considered of paramount importance.” (Dietrich Bartel, \textit{Musica Poetica: Musical-Rhetorical Figures in German Baroque Music} (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 35.)
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