"THE INITIAL PLUNGE," "THE SOUSED PERIOD," AND "CONTRITION"?: MOVING TOWARDS A STYLE OF PETER SCHICKELE'S FUNNY MUSIC IN HIS P.D.Q. BACH WORKS

By Tammy Ravas

After nearly forty years of "discovery" it truly is no secret that Peter Schickele is still composing the works of the fictional composer P.D.Q. Bach. By composing this humorous music, he carves his own niche as a musical comedian while also maintaining the other part of his career as a "serious" composer. An interview of 1974 with Peter Schickele provides a historical snapshot of his techniques of composing the music of P.D.Q. Bach.[1] We learn that he prefers to parody music of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries because of the form and pattern of the pieces. He blends well-known motives, like "Shave and a Haircut, Two Bits," with baroque and classical sounding phrases, and adds familiar classical and popular themes as quotations. Schickele composes music to make the performer seem lost in a complicated passage, and to be playing wrong notes and strange sounds. Another technique he uses is to create instruments out of unusual items and materials such as bicycles and music stands. The jokes present in the P.D.Q. Bach music may be written for a musically sophisticated audience, but they have a wide appeal. The musical jokes can range from witty—with tricks played on an established form or style—to slapstick, and from popular to obscure. A couple of questions come to mind: "Has Peter Schickele always told similar jokes in his P.D.Q. Bach music?" And, "Does P.D.Q. Bach's musical comedy have early, middle, and late periods?"[2]

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1. Linda R. Lowry, "Humor in Instrumental Music: A Discussion of Musical Affect, Psychological Concepts of Humor and Identification of Musical Humor" (Ph.D. diss., Ohio State University, 1974), 90.

2. The spoof "periods" of P.D.Q. Bach's musical output quoted in the title of this article are from Professor Peter Schickele, *The Definitive Biography of P.D.Q. Bach (1807–1742)?* (New York: Random House, 1976). "The Initial Plunge was the period during which P.D.Q. Bach learned all that he ever learned about the craft of music composition; it lasted about six days" (p. 166). "The Soused Period was by far the longest period in P.D.Q. Bach's creative life. . . . During this period P.D.Q. developed a richer sense of harmony due to almost constant double vision . . ." (p. 172). ". . . the Contrition Period represents an attempt by P.D.Q. to 'go home again,' to return, as it were, to his musical womb. . . . He composed as if he were oblivious to all the music he had written [previously]" (p. 195).

The goal of this article is to introduce a different way of thinking about the P.D.Q. Bach music, and to intimate that it could, indeed, have early, middle, and late periods. This will be accomplished using the following methods: reviewing existing literature on humor in music for types and categories of musical humor, applying these categories to the P.D.Q. Bach music in a brief taxonomical discussion using a wide chronological range of representative works, and using this discussion to closely analyze and compare two vocal and two instrumental pieces. This approach will demonstrate how the musical jokes are treated, and will establish a framework for more comprehensive examination of comic stylistic trends of the P.D.Q. Bach music over time.

For the sake of brevity and clarity, this article will not address certain aspects related to this topic. As is well recognized, P.D.Q. Bach is not simply a pen name under which Peter Schickele writes comic music. P.D.Q. Bach can also be defined as an institution in a sense that Schickele has created a theatrical and performing tradition with the P.D.Q. Bach concerts, as well as his alter ego "Professor Peter Schickele," member of the fictional Department of Music Pathology, University of Southern North Dakota at Hoople. Because this study is devoted particularly to the style of jokes found in music, it will focus on the *music* of P.D.Q. Bach and not the theatrical elements of a P.D.Q. Bach concert, except as they are prescribed in a score. Nor will this study delve into descriptions of humor in music, or explain why a joke in a P.D.Q. Bach piece is funny. Existing literature on the psychology of musical humor explains this quite well.[3] Furthermore, one does not need to understand the causes of psychological and emotional effects that music may have for a listener in order to understand its purely technical aspects. Doing so quickly becomes an exercise in pedantry, as the reader will become lost in tangential discussions in an attempt to see the comic forms and structures inherent within the music.[4] What will be addressed here is how the P.D.Q. Bach music can be analyzed based on studies of humor in music, and to introduce readers to the notion that musical jokes in P.D.Q. Bach have evolved over time. In the context of this paper, to attempt an explanation of why the jokes in

3. For an introduction to the topic, readers may wish to consult the following: Laurie Jean Lister, *Humor as a Concept in Music: A Theoretical Study of Expression in Music, the Concept of Humor, and Humor in Music, with an Analytical Example, W. A. Mozart, "Ein musikalischer Spass," KV 522*, Publikationen des Instituts für Musikanalytik Wien, 2 (Frankfurt; New York: Peter Lang, 1994); Lowry, "Humor in Instrumental Music"; Helen K. Mull, "A Study of Humor in Music," *American Journal of Psychology* 62 (1949): 560–66; Daniel Sabbeth, "Freud's Theory of Jokes and the Linear–Analytic Approach to Music: A Few Points in Common," in *Psychoanalytic Explorations in Music*, Applied Psychoanalysis Series, 3, ed. by Stuart Feder, Richard L. Karmel, and George H. Pollock, 49–59 (Madison, CT: International Universities Press, 1990). See also the list of suggested additional readings at the end of this article.

4. Rossana Dalmonte, "Towards a Semiology of Humour in Music," *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* 26, no. 2 (December 1995): 167–87.

P.D.Q. Bach are funny would be tantamount to explaining why water is wet, and falls outside of its scope.

CATEGORIES OF MUSICAL HUMOR: A REVIEW OF EXISTING LITERATURE

The discussion of categories and even subcategories of musical humor is nothing new. Halfway through the eighteenth century, comical music, mainly in Germany and Austria, had its own classification system complete with a set of characteristics, norms, and rules regarding performance. This kind of categorization lasted into the early nineteenth century.[5] Comedy was divided into two levels—high and low. High comedy yielded "pure laughter," and low comedy, or the ludicrous, yielded laughter with contempt.[6] This can most certainly be applied to the P.D.Q. Bach oeuvre, but it may be applied inconsistently. Some may consider all of the P.D.Q. Bach music to be a farce of classical music, while others may argue that the finer points of certain pieces fall into the "high comic" category. It may also be unfair to subject the P.D.Q. Bach music to this approach, as Peter Schickele states that there is no hidden agenda behind his satirization of classical music.[7]

The recent literature on humor in music includes several works that deal specifically with types and categories of musical humor. In some cases these categories are sparse, vague, and inconsistent. Some of the works are lengthy chapters in books or of book length; they provide explicit and detailed headings for musical humor with plenty of accompanying musical examples. Others have only a few categories, dealing primarily with the intent of composers to create a humorous composition, but are backed up by very sound arguments. Many of the consulted articles describe a category of musical humor based only on isolated instances of jokes, but do not subcategorize them by more specific headings, while other authors present some semblance of a hierarchy. These hierarchical treatments will prove helpful when it comes to in-depth analyses of works, allowing for more nuanced explanations of musical joke technique. The varieties of musical humor discussed in this literature review will form a basis for applicable categories in the P.D.Q. Bach music, and will then be used for further analysis.

Articles that contain inconsistent categories of humor are typically found in nonmusicological periodicals. Here are two examples. "The

5. Ibid., 171.

6. Tilden A. Russell, "'Über das Komische in der Musik': The Schütze–Stein Controversy," *Journal of Musicology* 4, no. 1 (Winter 1985–86): 71.

7. Tammy Ravas, *Peter Schickele: A Bio-Bibliography*, Bio-Bibliographies in Music, 92 (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004), 8.

Musical Mask of Comedy" by Richard A. Coolidge, which appeared in a music education journal, presents three types of musical humor: absolute, autonomous, and programmatic.[8] According to Coolidge, "absolute" musical humor consists of funny effects made for their own sakes, with no attributed motives or subjects—musical instruments making rude or childish noises, for example. "Autonomous" humor consists of "in" jokes for musicians, such as musical quotations, or a dominant seventh chord resolving to something other than the tonic. "Programmatic" humor is defined by the composer—as in instrumental program music—or by collaborators, such as librettists in opera, or lyricists and poets of individual songs. "The Composer Jests," by Ludwig Misch, appeared in *Musical America*.[9] Misch groups musical humor into eleven categories with illustrative and sometimes whimsical headings. Some of these have similar meanings: "Logical Contradiction" and "The 'Surprise' of Course" address humor resulting from a contradiction between what is expected and what actually happens; similarly, " 'Naughty' Joke?" refers to unexpected dissonances and forte chords. Other categories are more specific, such as "The Canary," dealing with funny titles; or "Pigs and Bassoons," which addresses instruments making funny noises, or a work transposed for an instrument in a much lower register than originally intended. Unfortunately, many instances of musical comedy fall under more than one of these headings, making Coolidge's and Misch's categories of musical humor inconsistent and confusing.

Book-length studies of musical humor typically organize chapters into hierarchical categories of humor that include very specific subcategories with accompanying musical examples. Two such volumes will be discussed here.

In his categorization of "Inherent Types of Musical Comedy" [Typen immanent musikalischer Komik], Michael Stille allows only three general categories of musical comedy: "Playing on the expectations of listeners: the trumped anticipation" [Das Spiel mit der Erwartung des Hörers: die getäuschte Antizipation], "Connection of contrasting sound layers" [Die Verknüpfung kontrastierender Klangschichten], and "Comedy of musical transposition" [Die Komik musikalischer Transpositionen].[10] He breaks each of these into at least a few subcategories, and illustrates them with a discussion involving examples from the classical musical

8. Richard A. Coolidge, "The Musical Mask of Comedy," *Southwestern Musician combined with The Texas Music Educator* 41, no. 8 (March 1973): 2, 4–5.

9. Ludwig Misch, "The Composer Jests: Devices to Produce Comic Effects are as Numerous as Ingenious," *Musical America* 76, no. 10 (August 1956): 20, 30, 32–33.

10. Michael Stille, *Möglichkeiten des Komischen in der Musik*, Europäische Hochschulschriften, Reihe XXXVI, Musikwissenschaft, 52 (Frankfurt; New York: Peter Lang, 1990), 8–9. My translations.

literature. Under his first category Stille gives musical examples that support the following subheadings: "Thwarting of listeners through unexpected techniques" [Irreführung des Hörers durch unerwarteten satztechnischen Fortgang], "Comic formation of conclusions" [Komische Schlußbildungen], "Dynamic surprise effects" [Dynamische Überraschungseffekte], and "Comic irregularity in rhythm" [Komische Unregelmäßigkeiten im Rhythmus].[11] His second category features discussions of "Groups of greatly contrasting instruments" [Zusammenstellung stark kontrastierender Instrumente], "Combination of heterogeneous voices" [Kombination heterogener Stimmen], and "Quodlibet" [Das Quodlibet].[12] The third category contains five subcategories: "Unusual use of instruments" [Ungewöhnliche Verwendung von Instrumenten], "Imitation of uncommon instruments in the nature of concerts" [Nachahmung von im Konzertwesen ungebräuchlichen Instrumenten], "Musical caricatures of the village musician and amateur composers" [Musikalische Karikaturen dörflicher Musizierart und dilettantischer Kompositionsweise], "Musical comic parody" [Die musikalisch-komische Parodie] where known musical works and styles are degraded and travestied so that listeners will laugh, and "Comedy of musical quotes" [Die Komik musikalischer Zitate].[13]

Hubert Daschner, like Stille, in his *Humor in der Musik*, states categories and subcategories of musical humor, and gives supporting musical examples for each. Some of these are similar to Stille's, such as a discussion of how elements inherent in music like dynamics and rhythm can contribute to musical comedy.[14] His approach to other kinds of humor differs from other writers; he addresses "Object-bound humor" [Objektgebundener Humor] in music with a discussion of different animals and humans as the comic object throughout the common-practice

11. Some musical examples cited by Stille, respective of their subcategories are: the Scherzo movement of Haydn's String Quartet op. 53, no. 5, where he forces a long rest before a resolution of the chord from the opening phrase (Stille, 83–84); Richard Strauss's *Burlesque* for piano and orchestra where a quick moving piano cadenza ends with a grand pause, the strings play a quiet pizzicato chord, and the timpani plays a D to softly end the piece (pp. 95–96); Beethoven's Piano Sonata op. 14, no. 2, end of the second movement, which features an effect similar to Haydn's "Surprise" Symphony (pp. 103–5); and Haydn's Symphony no. 58, where the bass instruments advance the rhythm and contrast with the violins and oboes (pp. 109–11).

12. Stille features an analysis of the P.D.Q. Bach piece "My Bonnie Lass She Smelleth" from *The Triumphs of Thusnelda* (pp. 115–16). His analysis concentrates on the subtleties intrinsic in the music rather than the humorous text of this P.D.Q. Bach piece. The three women's voices—soprano I, soprano II, and alto—contrast wildly with the tenor and bass. The three high voices jump out in shrill alternating octaves in mm. 17–22. The tenor joins with a monotonous, repeating and declining scalar run, and the bass sings in minor seconds like a trill at a snail's pace. This kind of composition forms a coarse kind of comedy as the three different registers combat each other.

13. Ibid., 121–77, Stille discusses examples which fall under his third category of musical humor.

14. Hubert Daschner, *Humor in der Musik*, Materialien zur Didaktik und Methodik des Musikunterrichts, 13 (Wiesbaden: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1986), 98, 104–20, 147, 149, 180–81. My translations.

era.[15] Humorous treatments of dice music, canons, palindromes, and *Augenmusik* appear in his book as well.[16] Lastly, Daschner gives us a look at different forms of humor apparent in vocal music in his chapter "Word and text-bound humor" [Wort- und textgebundener Humor].[17] He covers instances of stuttering, word puzzles, spelling jokes, excessive chatter in texts, imitation of dialects, and gibberish. He also discusses the word- and tone-painting in vocal music throughout music history.

More recent literature explains how a composer's intentions can be an important factor in the discourse on musical humor. Daschner touches upon this in his book, and Gretchen Wheelock examines intentionality in musical humor from an interesting standpoint.[18] As an example, in the opening chapter of her book on Haydn's musical humor, she discusses Mozart's *Ein musikalischer Spass* (A Musical Joke), which was well recognized even in Mozart's time as being intentionally humorous.[19] Mozart makes fun of inept composers and performers in this piece; he takes on the persona of an incompetent composer and must prove that this individual cannot create a satisfying piece of music. Wheelock's argument is analogous to Peter Schickele's intentional jesting with the P.D.Q. Bach music. Listeners understand that P.D.Q. Bach is a fictional composer, and another persona or career facet of Peter Schickele. In most P.D.Q. Bach works, Schickele proves that his fictional composer is truly "the last, and by all means the least"[20] son of J.S. Bach, with intentional wrong notes and musical "accidents."

Two scholars intimate that there are two types of musical humor: intentional and unintentional. Zofia Lissa states that composers typically make a conscious and premeditative decision to create musical humor.[21] Rossanna Dalmonte, like Lissa, states that musical humor has two categories overall: "poïetic" or intentional humor, and "aesthesic" or unintentional humor.[22] She divides intentional humor into three subcategories: explicit, implicit, and syncretic. Explicit poïetic humor refers to linguistic expressions, such as titles and the technical markings added to a score. Composers can obviously verbalize their intent to write a funny piece by using titles like "humoresque" or "burlesque." (They can also do

15. Ibid., 61–97.
16. Ibid., 189–203.
17. Ibid., 17–60.
18. Daschner, 13; Gretchen A. Wheelock, *Haydn's Ingenious Jesting with Art: Contexts of Musical Wit and Humor* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1992), 6–9; see also David Weintraub, "Humor in Song" (Ed.D. diss., Columbia University, 1974).
19. Wheelock, 6–9.
20. Schickele, *Definitive Biography*, 4.
21. Zofia Lissa, "Über das Komische in der Musik," in her *Aufsätze zur Musikästhetik: Eine Auswahl*, 93–137 (Berlin: Henschel, 1969), 103–4.
22. Dalmonte, 168–69.

this with humorous programmatic titles.[23]) Implicit poïetic humor refers to comedy readily apparent in the musical structure itself, and this form of humor can occur in "pure" music. Syncretic poïetic humor is expressed through comic aspects that derive from a work's texts and theatrical situations; this is even more interesting when the text or theatrical situation contrasts with the music, such as a solemn text sung to upbeat and light-hearted music.

Taking into consideration all of these studies that suggest categories of musical humor, I propose the following scheme to apply to the P.D.Q. Bach music. The majority of the literature surveyed divided musical humor into categories based on their relationship to the music itself. Daschner, Wheelock, and Lissa's studies addressed composer intent as an important component of humor in music, and Dalmonte went a step further to consider intent to be possibly the ultimate criterion for musical comedy. If we are to apply her two headings of poïetic and aesthesic musical humor to the P.D.Q. Bach music, we can successfully argue that all of this part of Schickele's oeuvre is poïetic, because these works carry the label "P.D.Q. Bach," which couches them within the context of a joke.[24] From this point, the poïetic subcategories—explicit, implicit, and syncretic forms of musical humor—can apply to the P.D.Q. Bach works. Further subcategories are loosely based on those suggested by the other authors consulted, namely those found in Daschner and Stille, and I have taken the liberty of devising a few new ones for specific jokes appearing in P.D.Q. Bach. Implicit subcategories feature the use of musical quotations; music that breaks common-practice rules; contrasting and antithetical musical styles; the use of clichéd musical phrases, melodies, and rhythms; and unusual instrumentation—which could be regarded as both implicit and explicit, as will be demonstrated. Explicit subcategories consist of funny titles for works and movements. Syncretic subcategories feature theatrical performance instructions; funny lyrics, plots, vocal expressions and executions; and linkage of music with texts. The following discussion will act as a means for the analyses in the last portion of this article.

23. Ibid., 181.

24. Under his own name, Peter Schickele writes music that contains humorous elements. This may not be so obvious for lack of explicit intention and presents a difficult argument. Such a discussion would require us to have a more serious look at humorous meanings in music. Further complicating matters in Peter Schickele's music is the notion that audiences *expect* to hear something funny, thus invoking the "aesthesic" category of musical humor suggested by Dalmonte. Therefore a more thorough and separate study of Peter Schickele's "serious" music is warranted.

IMPLICIT FORMS OF MUSICAL HUMOR IN P.D.Q. BACH

Schickele employs a diverse array of forms of implicit musical humor, some of which are targeted towards musicians while others are directed towards a more general audience. The blatant musical jokes can cause the entire audience to cringe and laugh, while the subtle ones can quietly titillate more musically educated ears. Musical quotations form entire works and movements, or they may appear as quick surprising motives. Performance "accidents" provide shock value in a work. Two or more clashing musical styles often are used within a work or movement. Musical clichés consisting of short and familiar melodic and rhythmic motives enhance these pieces, and they can function like musical quotations as well. Some pieces call for unusual toy, folk, or homemade instruments, or they employ odd combinations of instruments.

Musical Quotations

Schickele's most ingenious and best-recognized type of humor in the P.D.Q. Bach music is quotation of other compositions. His skill with this type of humor is sharp and encyclopedic, in that he quotes all kinds of music ranging from obscure to famous to cliché. He uses classical, popular, and folk music to these ends, and in doing so creates "in" jokes for classical musicians, and more recognizable humor for laypersons. Schickele usually quotes only a small, yet recognizable, part of a piece, which may, however, form a thematic basis for a single movement, or for an entire P.D.Q. Bach work. Other times the quote will be inserted just once, much to the listener's surprise. Figure 1 is an example of a single statement of a musical quotation appearing in the recitative "So Saying" from *The Seasonings* (1965).[25] Five bars from the end, Schickele uses the first five measures of "Old Black Joe" by Stephen Foster to the words, "I'm cumin, I'm cumin, for my head is bending low." This is the only statement of Foster's music in *The Seasonings*; the joke stands alone in this particular recitative. In the fifth movement of *The Short-Tempered Clavier* (1993), Schickele successfully pulls off a fugue on "Shave and a Haircut," building an entire movement from a single quote (see fig. 2).

Musical Rule-Breaking and Performance "Accidents"

Unexpected dissonant chords, sections of the orchestra having performance "accidents," passages repeated interminably, and obviously wild key-changes can be either witty or shocking. At one end of the spectrum,

25. Dates of composition for works are from Ravas, *Peter Schickele: A Bio-Bibliography*, in which details of publications, premieres, recordings, and performances of works are also found.

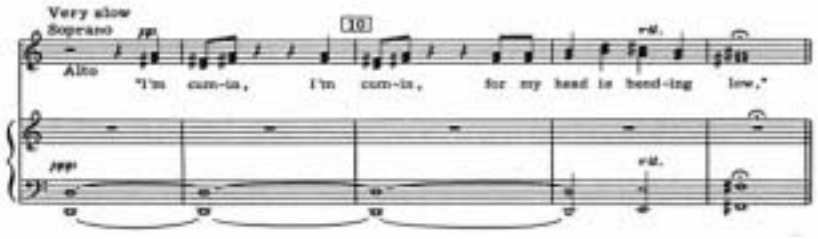

Fig. 1. From "So Saying," *The Seasonings*, p. 24 (used with permission of Peter Schickele)

Fig. 2. From fugue in fifth movement of *Short-Tempered Clavier*, p. 21 (©1998 by Theodore Presser Co., used with permission of Carl Fischer Music)

this effect can be quite obvious; at the opposite end, there may be only one or two dissonant notes that sound like an error. In *The Seasonings* (fig. 3), we see how Schickele builds up to a consonant and dramatic ending, only to resolve the penultimate chords to something cacaphonous. Typically, these sorts of surprises have dissonances injected into them for further exaggeration of humor.[26]

Contrasting Musical Styles

Contrasting musical styles appear frequently in the P.D.Q. Bach music. Often, these are not direct quotes, yet Schickele will insert blues, ragtime, and jazz phrases into otherwise decidedly classical-style pieces. The most obvious conflicting genres are classical and popular music, as, for example, a piece that begins with a baroque fugue for organ, but ends

26. Other examples of this sort of musical hijinks include: *Grand Serenade for an Awful Lot of Winds and Percussion* (1975), in which several percussion instruments are knocked over loudly during the fourth movement, "Rondo Grando Mucho" (this is notated in the score as "Crasho Grosso," with reference to a performance note on the bottom of the page giving specific instruction). Other musical accidents include repeated passages, as in the beginning movement of *Concerto for Horn and Hardart* (1965); the strings become stuck on one motive, and the conductor must count out loud to bring them back to the fold. In "Song to Celia" from *Liebeslieder Polkas* (1979), the chorus becomes adamant about changing keys, singing one half-step sharp or flat, and the pianists try in vain to return them to some tonic.

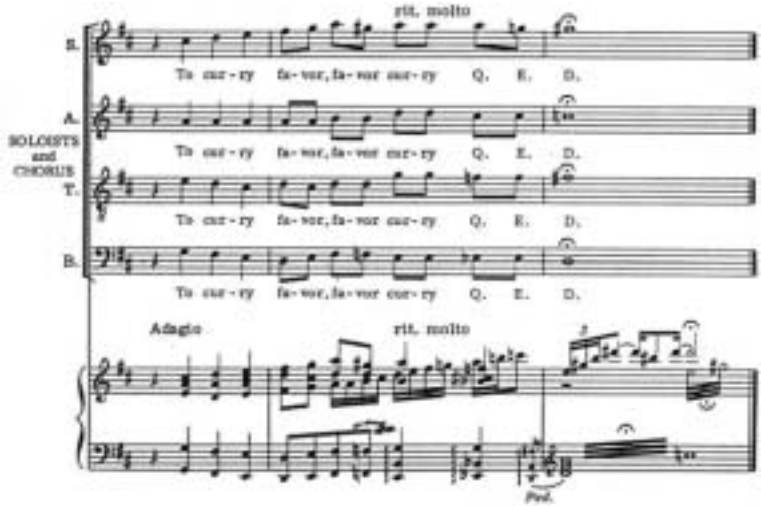

Fig. 3. From "To Curry Favor," *The Seasonings*, p. 44 (used with permission of Peter Schickele)

like a jazz piece. Two conspicuously clashing styles of music may also be scored simultaneously. "Toccata et Fuga Obnoxia" from *Little Pickle Book* (1987) begins very similarly to J.S. Bach's famous *Toccata and Fugue in D Minor* (fig. 4). Although the movement quotes the popular tune "Atisket Atasket" for the fugue subject, the baroque style is consistent. The last two measures, however, resemble a free improvisation performed by a jazz organist, thus showing how P.D.Q. Bach's compositions ingeniously purloin music from nearly every historical style (fig. 5).

Musical Clichés

Musical clichés in the P.D.Q. Bach oeuvre consist of very short, overused, and familiar melodic and rhythmic snippets inserted in the score. Some of the melodic motives that are examples of cliché are indeed quotes, but they are so ubiquitous that they warrant a separate discussion. Some that come to mind are familiar tunes such as "Westminster Chimes," "Mary Had a Little Lamb," or "The Worms Crawl In, the Worms Crawl Out." Some clichés take the form of classical-music stereotypes, such as a cadenza that drags out in length, or tired, old rhythms that pervade the endings of phrases.

We can locate examples of this type of humor in any P.D.Q. Bach work, but only a few are cited here for demonstration. At the end of the recitative "And Lo" in *Iphigenia in Brooklyn* (1963), the harpsichord is

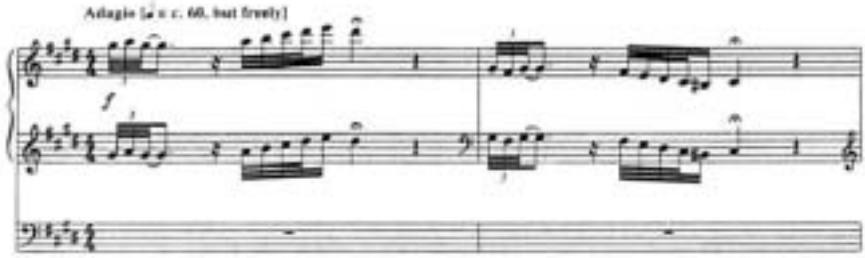

Fig. 4. From first movement of *Little Pickle Book*, p. 4 (©1996 by Theodore Presser Co., used with permission of Carl Fischer Music)

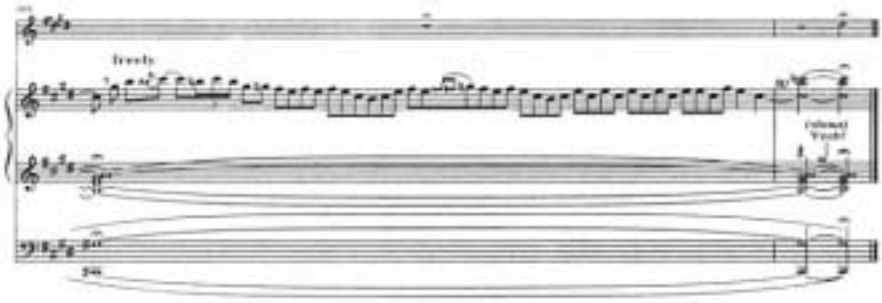

Fig. 5. From first movement of *Little Pickle Book*, p. 9 (©1996 by Theodore Presser Co., used with permission of Carl Fischer Music)

allowed a very long cadenza.[27] "Do You Suffer" from *Diverse Ayres on Sundrie Notions* (1966), and the fugue from the third movement of *Short-Tempered Clavier*, quote "The Hootchy-Kootchy Dance," also known as "They Don't Wear Pants in the Southern Part of France" (figs. 6 and 7).[28] The sample used in "Do You Suffer" is inserted once for comic relief, whereas in *Short-Tempered Clavier* the theme is used throughout the fugue. This shows that Schickele uses clichéd musical motives in the same way as other musical quotations.

Concocted Instruments and Unorthodox Instrumentation

The P.D.Q. Bach music can employ many strange instruments, which are both implicitly and explicitly funny. The instruments are implicitly

27. Peter Schickele, *Iphigenia in Brooklyn* (Bryn Mawr, PA: T. Presser, 1963), 9.
28. James J. Fuld, *The Book of World Famous Music: Classical, Popular and Folk*, 5th ed. (New York: Dover, 2000), 276.

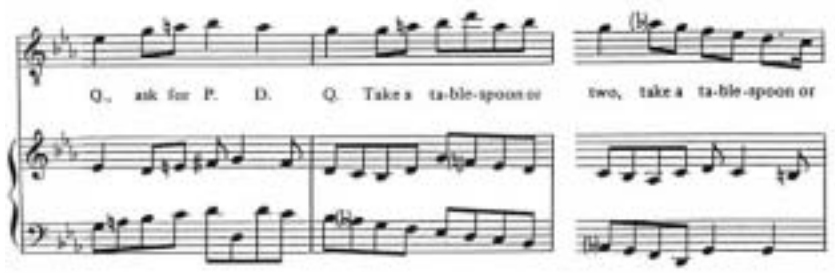

Fig. 6. From "Do You Suffer," *Diverse Ayres on Sundrie Notions*, pp. 5–6 (©1979 by Theodore Presser Co., used with permission of Carl Fischer Music)

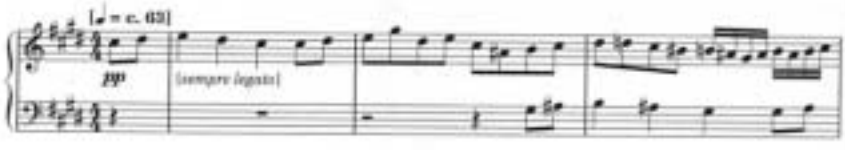

Fig. 7. From third movement of *Short-Tempered Clavier*, p. 15 (©1998 by Theodore Presser Co., used with permission of Carl Fischer Music)

funny because of their obnoxious sounds, regardless of comedic context or intent. By making these instruments obbligato in the score, Schickele explicitly ensures intent. Some of these instruments require performers to combine household items with parts of a "legitimate" musical instrument. Other would-be instruments can be found in toy stores, and some may not be very easy to locate—like the antique Automat machine used in *Concerto for Horn and Hardart* (1965).[29] The instruments create silly sound effects by themselves, or they are just funny to hear because the performers often try in vain to play them to the best of their ability. Performance notes and orchestration force the musicians to play in an awkward manner, or in a way that was never traditionally intended. Popular and folk instruments also commonly appear in P.D.Q. Bach's instrumentation along with unorthodox combinations of classical instruments.

The following pieces illustrate these more specific uses of unusual instrumentation. *Sinfonia Concertante* (1959) is the first P.D.Q. Bach work to capitalize on these various and sundry instruments for comedy. The work

29. The Horn & Hardart Automat restaurant chain, which thrived in Philadelphia and New York City between the years of the Depression and the end of World War II, featured banks of coin-operated windows that displayed and dispensed individual servings of freshly prepared food.

is scored for lute, balalaika, double-reed slide music stand, ocarina, left-handed sewer flute, bagpipes, and strings. While the balalaika, ocarina, and bagpipes are true folk instruments, the left-handed sewer flute and double-reed slide music stand are obviously homemade. The first resembles a toy flute with an old-fashioned faucet head fastened to one end, and the other is made of a collapsible music stand with a reed inserted in the bottom (the player slides the top as needed to change the pitch).[30] Brass mouthpieces and double reeds can be used alone as scored instruments, as in *Iphigenia in Brooklyn* and *Lip My Reeds* (1991); the later work is a bassoon quartet, containing a passage for which the players are instructed in the score to "Remove reed" to play higher pitched notes "reed alone."[31] In *Sonata for Viola Four Hands and Harpsichord* (1966), two viola players perform simultaneously on a single instrument: "the two viola players sit almost facing each other. Player I holds the instrument and plays in a normal fashion, while player II, who is sitting at the other end of the viola (just beyond the scroll) and facing player I, plays the instrument like a cello. . . ."[32] Works such as *"Dutch" Suite in G Major* (1977) for bassoon and tuba, and *"Safe" Sextet* (1989) for piccolo, English horn, bass clarinet, contrabassoon, harp, and celesta use combinations of instruments that are not traditional, and employ extremes in pitch ranges. Lastly, many other pieces use toys like kazoos, pickle-shaped flutes, or balloons.

EXPLICIT FORMS OF MUSICAL HUMOR IN P.D.Q. BACH

In addition to labeling a work as by P.D.Q. Bach and assigning it a humorous "Schickele" number, using a whimsical title is another way that Schickele clearly states a humorous intent. Nearly every P.D.Q. Bach piece has a humorous title for the overall work. Some have humorous movement titles as well. True to P.D.Q. Bach's modus operandi, these titles can mock famous classical pieces through pun, travesty, conflation, and innuendo. Nontraditional tempo markings in German and Italian are commonly used as movement titles in this music, and they usually need translation in order to understand the joke. The earliest P.D.Q. Bach piece demonstrates explicit musical humor immediately—*The*

30. Illustrations of these two instruments are found in Schickele, *Definitive Biography*, 171, 175. In the same volume, see also the "Glossary of Unusual Instruments Used by P.D.Q. Bach," 227–29. Many of the other early works, such as *Pervertimento* (1965), *Serenude* (1966), *Perückenstück* (1966), *"Erotica" Variations* (1972), and *The Seasonings*, use similar kinds of concocted devices.

31. Peter Schickele, *Lip My Reeds (S. 32'): Prelude and Fugue for Four Bassoons* (Bryn Mawr, PA: T. Presser, 1993), 6–7.

32. Peter Schickele, *Sonata for Viola Four Hands and Harpsichord (S. 440)* (Bryn Mawr, PA: T. Presser, 1971), [3].

Sanka Cantata (1953), which obviously mocks the title of J.S. Bach's *"Coffee" Cantata*. The movement names, though based on private jokes between Schickele and his friends, are comical as well: "Praise Be to the Lloyd for Heath Ernest," "Isabella, the Heavenly Hostess," and "Sing a Song of Sig's Pants." They are absurd on their own, despite their inside-joke origins.

Funny Titles

The majority of P.D.Q. Bach titles contain travesties or conflations of well-known titles by other composers, such as *Fanfare for the Common Cold* (1962)—a caricature of Copland's *Fanfare for the Common Man*—and *Liebeslieder Polkas*—a takeoff on Brahms's *Liebeslieder Waltzes*. *Abduction of Figaro* (1981) conflates Mozart's titles *Abduction from the Seraglio* and *Marriage of Figaro*. There are many other examples like these in this repertoire. Some titles are outright bawdy and contain blatant innuendo: *Pervertimento*, *Serenude for Devious Instruments*, *Erotica Variations*, and *"Safe" Sextet*.

Funny Movement Titles and Tempo Markings

Schickele capitalizes on different languages to create comical movement titles and tempo markings; for instance, *Traumarei* (1967) for piano combines the German *träumerei* (dreaming) and the similar-sounding English word "trauma." *Gross Concerto* (1961) and *Sinfonia Concertante* have some interesting movement titles in German or Italian that resemble and mock tempo the markings in classical music. The first movement of *Gross Concerto* is "Majestätisch mit einer schnellen Mässigkeit—unglaublich majestätisch" which translates as "Majestic with quick moderation—unbelievably majestic." Another example of this is seen in *Sinfonia Concertante*, which is not itself an obviously humorous title, but the movement titles give nonsensical directions: "Sehr unruhig mit Schmalz" means "Very restless with sentiment" (schmalz); the second movement's tempo marking, "Andante senza moto," means "going without motion."

SYNCRETIC FORMS OF MUSICAL HUMOR IN P.D.Q. BACH

Syncretic musical humor in P.D.Q. Bach brings together a contrast between the music and the theatrical elements or vocal texts. The lyrics of a song and the humorous scenario of a larger vocal work can be heightened or diminished by the accompaniment. Sometimes the lyrics comprise the only joke in a work. Another form of syncretic humor is found in theatrical elements that are used in otherwise nontheatrical instrumental or vocal pieces. These can occur throughout a work, but they

often are not the focus of the primary jokes in the piece. This application sets a heightened contextual framework for other humor. At other times, these elements present only one or two gleeful visual surprises in a work.

Performance Instructions

Performers in P.D.Q. Bach music are instructed at times to create visual or staged effects, such as waving balloons around or holding up signs. Visual effects in otherwise nontheatrical works can be used throughout a piece, or may be used in only one or two isolated instances. The score of *Twelve Quite Heavenly Songs* (1978) directs a person on stage to hold up signs in the performance.

> During the performance the cassette machine is operated by a person sitting, toward the stage left, behind a rack holding a set of large cards. Each card contains the name of one of the signs of the zodiac. After each song the person plays the Interlude and flips the top card to the floor revealing the title of the next song. The last card, revealed during the last eight bars of the piece (as the singers are making a vaudeville-style exit), reads "APPLAUSE."[33]

The performers carry out these stage instructions throughout the entire work, but this is not the only joke in the work as evidenced by the lyrics of each song.[34] *Lip My Reeds* has an example of visual humor in which the stage action serves not only a comic function, but also a technically musical one. The first bassoonist must place a cardboard tube inside the bell joint of the fourth bassoonist's instrument. Doing so produces A_2 below the instrument's normal lowest note, $B\flat_2$. The fourth bassoonist keys the $B\flat_2$ while the first bassoonist shifts the tube to move between these two low notes. When the fourth bassoonist executes the concluding A_2 of the movement [***ff***] *subito*, the "Tube goes flying."[35]

Humor in Lyrics

P.D.Q. Bach's vocal music allows us to enjoy Schickele's verbal wit and humor. His lyrics can include puns, anachronisms, bawdiness, non sequiturs, and cliché slang. The best examples of Schickele's groan-inducing

33. Peter Schickele, *Twelve Quite Heavenly Songs: Arie proprio zodicale (S. 160): For Bargain Counter Tenor, Basso Blotto, and Keyboards* (Bryn Mawr, PA: T. Presser, 1984), 3.

34. Another example can be found in "To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time," in *Liebeslieder Polkas, S.2/4: For Chorus with Piano, 5 Hands* (Bryn Mawr, PA: T. Presser, 1981), 8–9. Two female singers hold up balloons; one balloon is filled with helium and tied shut, while the other is inflated but left unknotted. The helium-filled balloon is released after the chorus sings a verse regarding youth. Upon singing the last words of the piece, which refer to growing old, the unknotted balloon is released and makes distasteful noises.

35. Schickele, *Lip My Reeds*, 3.

puns are found in different movements of *Twelve Quite Heavenly Songs*. "Libra," for instance, is a pun on the notion of scales in the text as well as in the music. The opening piano solo begins with scalar runs, and the lyrics are about animals with scales: "Scales are very handy for snakes / Scales have really got what it takes / To move the yellow bellies of snakes around."[36] The second half of the lyrics are solfège syllables sung to scales.[37] Thus the music enhances a joke in the text. An equally ingenious type of humor is Schickele's use of verbal anachronisms in a fashion similar to his use of antithetical musical styles. *Liebeslieder Polkas* uses texts by Elizabethan and Jacobean poets, with added exclamation of slang like "Hey Hey!" or "No way!"[38]

Link Between Plots, Lyrics, and Music in Vocal Works

Plots in P.D.Q. Bach vocal works are usually weak and nonsensical. Often these incoherent scenarios drive the funny lyrics of a piece, and the music tends to follow. *The Stoned Guest*'s (1967) humor results not from spoof of the Dargomïzshsky opera *The Stone Guest*, but from the banter, antagonism, and opera-star stereotypes of the two divas, Donna Ribalda and Carmen Ghia. The plot of this opera is not very cohesive, as is true also of other P.D.Q. Bach operas such as *Hansel and Gretel and Ted and Alice* (1972), and *Abduction of Figaro*. Donna Ribalda is lost in the woods after running from a masked attacker. Carmen Ghia appears with no explanation and joins her. Don Octave, Donna Ribalda's brother, finds the two women in the forest. A dog comes along and almost saves the party from further peril, but Il Commendatoreador (the Stoned Guest) discovers them instead. All of the characters die in some fashion at the end of the opera, and then everyone is magically revived so that they can sing the finale.[39]

There are a few obviously syncretic moments in *The Stoned Guest* where the music enhances and unites different parts of this strange plot. These occur mainly because of the antagonism between Carmen Ghia and Donna Ribalda. As Donna Ribalda laments her lack of direction in the woods, she holds the last note in the aria "Let's Face It" for as long as she possibly can until an applause sign flashes.[40] Donna Ribalda discovers she is not alone in the woods when Carmen Ghia sings "Now Is the Season." At the end of this aria, Carmen Ghia holds the last note as did Donna Ribalda in "Let's Face It," but then takes a breath and sneezes,

36. Schickele, *Heavenly Songs*, 16–17.
37. Ibid., 17–19.
38. Schickele, "To His Coy Mistress," in *Liebeslieder Polkas*, 7.
39. Schickele, *The Stoned Guest: A Half-Act Opera, S. 86 Proof* (Bryn Mawr, PA: T. Presser, 1973), 6.
40. Ibid., 12, 13.

prompting Donna Ribalda's quip, "I saw that!" After Don Octave discovers that Donna Ribalda is his sister, the two divas battle over who can hold a high note the longest (after asking Don Octave for a stopwatch); Carmen Ghia wins, and is presented with a trophy.[41] Similar connections between music, plot, and subject matter can be found in other P.D.Q. Bach collections of songs, choruses, and rounds.

Unusual Text Settings and Vocalizations

The last type of humor in P.D.Q. Bach to be discussed involves unusual text settings, vocal exaggerations, and odd vocalizations. Such effects are less blatantly theatrical than in the examples seen in *The Stoned Guest*; rather, the syncretic comedy results from the texts being uncomfortably set to the music, or the exaggeration of a word or syllable. For example, in *Iphigenia in Brooklyn* the countertenor sings the word "dying" repeatedly in the ground aptly titled "Dying." This is augmented by "die" being sung in the extremes of the countertenor's normal range, and by transforming it into nonsense syllables "die-dee."[42] Finally, texts can be set uncomfortably for the singer, as in "Do You Suffer" from *Diverse Ayres on Sundrie Notions* where the countertenor must sing "the pain" in quick dotted rhythms (fig. 8). A similar effect is used on the words "dishpan hands" in the same work's "Hear Me Through."[43] The humor in these kinds of jokes is even more apparent in live performance when audiences can witness vocalists' efforts to sing these text settings to the best of their ability.

To summarize this taxonomical discussion, the P.D.Q. Bach music is clearly intended to be funny, considering its historically comic background and context. This corpus of Schickele's music, therefore, is an example of what Rossana Dalmonte calls poïetic humor. Of Dalmonte's three subcategories of poïetic musical humor—implicit, explicit, and syncretic—the implicit forms are the most apparent in P.D.Q. Bach, meaning that many of Schickele's jokes occur strictly within the music, and these can be further divided into his use of musical quotes, contrasting musical styles, clichés, concocted instruments, and unorthodox instrumentation. Schickele's explicit forms of musical humor—jokes happening outside the music—occur in work and movement titles, or in the attribution to P.D.Q. Bach itself. Finally, syncretic musical humor unites contrasts between the texts or staged elements and music with perfor-

41. Ibid., 46, 47.
42. Schickele, *Iphigenia*, 11–12.
43. Peter Schickele, "Hear Me Through," in *Diverse Ayres on Sundrie Notions (S. 99 44/100): For Bargain Counter Tenor* (Bryn Mawr, PA: T. Presser, 1979), 8.

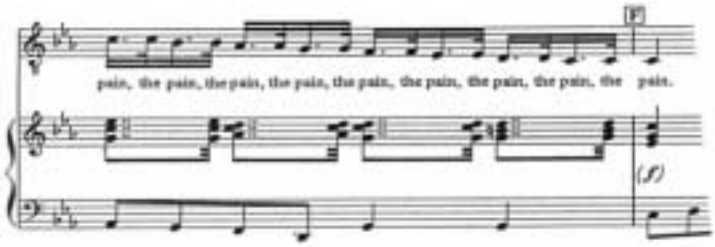

Fig. 8. From "Do You Suffer," *Diverse Ayres on Sundrie Notions*, p. 5 (©1979 by Theodore Presser Co., used with permission of Carl Fischer Music)

mance instructions, humor in lyrics, links between plots, lyrics, and music, and unusual text settings and vocalizations.

The following analyses will use these categories of humor to provide more examples of humor in the P.D.Q. Bach music, and also will demonstrate how these jokes function in a work overall. Finally, they will compare and contrast the treatments of similar works, showing that this part of Schickele's P.D.Q. Bach music has a distinct and evolving style.

ANALYSES

The categories of humor discussed above can be synthesized in analyses of the musical comedy in P.D.Q. Bach. A comparison and contrast of similar instrumental or vocal works will further illustrate the comic style in this music. Four works were chosen to examine how Schickele's comedy works through an entire piece of music. These are representative pieces based on their familiarity and their similarities in genre and instrumentation. *Schleptet* (1967) is a work for large chamber ensemble that is influenced by Beethoven's Septet for woodwinds, horn, and strings, op. 20; the comedy in *Schleptet* relies mainly on implicit musical jokes such as dissonance, the occasional wrong note, and performance "accidents." *The Musical Sacrifice* (1977) is influenced by J.S. Bach's *Musical Offering* in its similar instrumentation and compositional forms; the "Mysterioso Pizzicato" (or "Here Comes the Villain") theme is the main thematic material for the work and thus can be regarded as its overall joke. The quality and quantity of jokes in these two chamber pieces contrast greatly for having been written ten years apart. They share some similarities in musical humor on a more superficial level. *The Seasonings* (1965) is the earliest P.D.Q. Bach oratorio. The title is a travesty of Haydn's *Seasons*, yet Schickele's music shows only indirect influences of Haydn's musical style. A nonsensical plot, a wide variety of puns, surprises, non sequiturs, and strange instruments make the work funny on

several simultaneous levels. In a later oratorio, *Oedipus Tex* (1985), the comic elements are sharply different; here, all of the musical jokes relate directly to the plot. These two vocal works use totally different approaches to telling musical jokes.

Instrumental Works

Schleptet

Schleptet contains both implicitly musical and staged jokes. The work does not use any musical quotations, and there are few occurrences of antithetical musical styles and clichés. However, there are many occurrences of intentional musical "accidents" and "wrong" notes. Some of these are obvious to all, and others will be apparent only to those with a musical background. These musical accidents can include notes played in a weak manner so that pitch and tone are poorly sounded, or passages constantly repeated to give the impression the performer is lost. An occasional dissonant note is thrown in to interrupt a theme. A few staged jokes enhance the comedy. Explicit humor has direct and indirect relationships to the musical and theatrical jokes. Beethoven's Septet influences the key, instrumentation, and title of the work. Movement titles and tempo markings may set the stage for humor, or may be more obviously descriptive.

Whimsical movement titles and tempo markings typically relate to the musical jokes in *Schleptet*.[44] The title is a conflation of the Yiddish word "schlep" and the title of Beethoven's Septet. One must read the score's program note to realize any implicitly musical influences. Schickele states that *Schleptet* "is indebted (to put it kindly) to Beethoven's *Septet* in the same key."[45] In other words, the only influences from Beethoven are the use of the same key and number of instruments. The movement titles and tempo markings directly and indirectly determine the other jokes in the music that they label. Titles and tempo markings like "Allegro boffo," meaning to play quickly in a joking manner, establish a general intent to tell a musical joke. It sets the stage for more specific kinds of humor, such as the dissonant notes and inappropriately long rests present in this opening movement (pp. 3–6). "Adagio saccharino" (pp. 8–9) describes more specifically the excessively ornamented oboe

44. "Schlep" is a Yiddish colloquialism. As a verb it can mean to "haul or carry (something heavy or awkward). . . . [When used] (of a person) [to] go or move reluctantly or with effort": "schlep *verb*," in *The Oxford Dictionary of English*, ed. Catherine Soanes and Angus Stevenson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003). As a noun, "A troublesome business, (a piece of) hard work": "schlep *noun*[2]," in *The Oxford Essential Dictionary of Foreign Terms in English*, ed. Jennifer Speake (New York: Berkley Books, 1999). Both quoted from *Oxford Reference Online* (available by subscription, accessed 24 August 2005).

45. Peter Schickele, *Schleptet in E♭ Major (S. 0): For Flute, Oboe, Bassoon, Horn in F, Violin, Viola, and Cello* (Bryn Mawr, PA: T. Presser, 1967), 2.

melody and slow tempo. In "Presto hey nonny nonnio" (pp. 12–16), the players all shout "hey" at various intervals. The title "Yehudi menuetto" (pp. 9–12) does not set up the jokes in the movement at all; it simply combines the names of the famous violinist Yehudi Menuhin and the dance movement in triple meter popular in the baroque era.

Schleptet uses few theatrical elements. These truly enhance the comedy of the work, however, because listeners will not understand all of the jokes without the visual cues or following a score. The first two notes of the work are held "very long," and between notes the wind players take an audibly "loud breath." The French horn player is instructed to faint during the rest after the second note.[46] Two other instances involve the violinist snapping the last pizzicato note and saying "ouch" at the end of the second movement, "Menuetto con brio ma senza trio," and the performers yelling "hey" rhythmically during quick rests in the concluding "Presto hey nonny nonnio" movement. Near the end of this movement (p. 16) the cellist plucks an exposed solo pizzicato, after which the conductor (if the work is conducted) is to yell "hey" in a "concerned" manner. Each of these staged jokes involve the musicians overexerting or overplaying their parts.

Schleptet uses no musical quotes or strange instruments. Instead, the implicit musical jokes are more concerned with rule-breaking. Nearly every movement contains some dissonant note or planned musical accident. Some of these probably will be understood only by those with a background in classical music, while others will easily be understood by all. The first movement instructs the French hornist to play, ad libitum, "soggier and soggier" low notes (p. 3). At the beginning of the "Allegro boffo" the bassoon interjects a dissonant and high-register note into the first theme (fig. 9). Five measures later the violinist plays a run up beyond the fingerboard and out of its usual pitch range.[47] These examples would be obvious to the layperson, as they deliberately sound inappropriate. Other instances in the same movement may not be so obvious. In the middle of the "Allegro boffo" (p. 4) the melodic material seems to be treated as an unfinished thought; the violin and flute play sixteenth-note flourishes to create a sense of tension, before a long rest is inserted. In another passage, all instruments seem to conclude the movement, yet the violinist plays on for two-and-a-half measures, engrossed in an ascending run up to the high $e\flat^3$ (fig. 10). Other movements contain similar kinds of dissonant effects. The French horn plays "soggy" notes (p. 3), the oboe in the second movement is instructed to play "honky" notes in a

46. Ibid., 3. "Fall (to your right) off chair, shake head, get up."
47. Ibid., 4. "Continue bowing open E string as left hand goes *over* bow and grabs nose or scratches cheek."

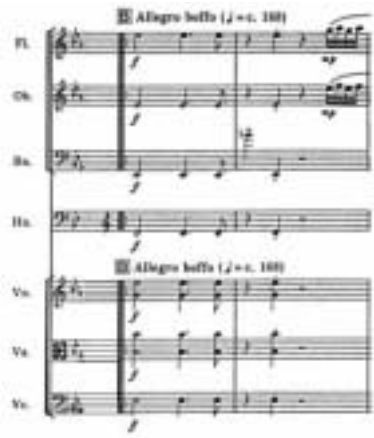

Fig. 9. From "Allegro boffo," *Schleptet*, p. 3 (©1967 by Theodore Presser Co., used with permission of Carl Fischer Music)

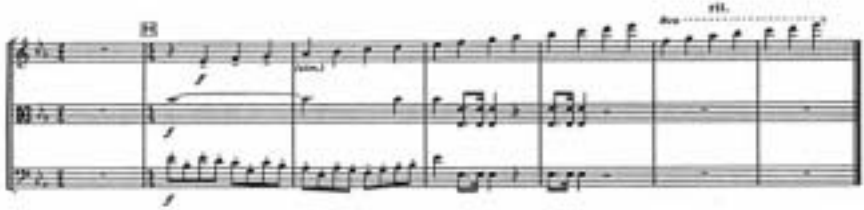

Fig. 10. From "Allegro boffo," *Schleptet*, p. 6 (©1967 by Theodore Presser Co., used with permission of Carl Fischer Music)

voice exchange response to the first theme (p. 6), and the last chord of the third movement (p. 9) does not resolve to the tonic. Figure 11 from "Yehudi menuetto" features a dramatically abrupt paroxysm of fast chromatic runs in different meters and different keys that interrupt the flow of the first theme. Other implicit musical comedy in *Schleptet* includes a use of contrasting musical styles as the flute's initial response to the first theme in "Yehudi menuetto" turns into a quiet jazz melody that acts as the transition into the trio (pp. 10–11).

The Musical Sacrifice

The Musical Sacrifice employs different kinds of musical jokes than *Schleptet*. It mocks J.S. Bach's *Musical Offering*, and uses instrumentation

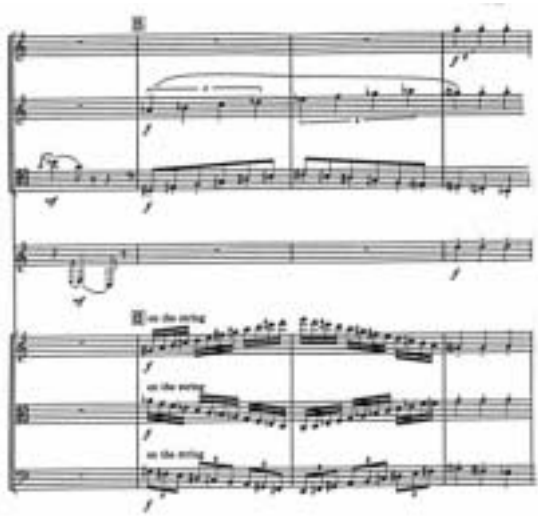

Fig. 11. From "Yehudi menuetto," *Schleptet*, p. 10 (©1967 by Theodore Presser Co., used with permission of Carl Fischer Music)

and compositional forms similar to that work. The overall joke relies on the treatments of the familiar theme "Mysterioso Pizzicato," also known as "Here Comes the Villain,"[48] and ingenious staged elements. The "Mysterioso" theme is set harmonically, melodically, in different modes, rhythms, and inversions. In the outer movements the theme is set fugally, and the performers sit and stand to indicate the subject and answer statements of the theme. To the lay audience member, this must look very strange, but trained musicians would get this "in" joke. The moaning in the wind instruments, tremolos, trills, and fluttertongue effects enhance the "scary" associations of the main theme. Jazz idioms are used throughout *The Musical Sacrifice*, and the first two occurrences may surprise the listener. The frequency of these jazzy insertions tend to lessen their comic effect, however, because they come to be expected. Some movement titles may not be particularly funny but those that are funny are not programmatic.

The work and movement titles for *The Musical Sacrifice* are generically descriptive, and contain travesties, conflations, and other sorts of mockery. Schickele's uses of fugues and canons are the only direct influences from J.S. Bach's *Musical Offering*, though the humorous movement titles "Fuga meshuga" and "Chorale Prelude: 'Da kommt ja der Schurke' "

48. Fuld, 385: "The music was played as background to scary scenes in the old silent movies."

relate to Bach's forms in a broad way. "Fuga meshuga" uses a popular theme for the fugue, and joins a Yiddish and a musical term to comic effect.[49] "Chorale Prelude: 'Da kommt ja der Schurke' " means "Chorale Prelude: 'Here Comes the Villain'," directly referencing the thematic material in the movement. The last movement, "The Grossest Fugue" is a travesty of Beethoven's string quartet known as *Grosse Fuge*. The parodied title, rather than musical jokes, constitute the principal element of the humor of the movement.

"Fuga meshuga" and "The Grossest Fugue" employ theatrical humor. Both are fugal settings of "Here Comes the Villain," and Schickele uses the same kind of stage business in each movement. The entrances of fugal subjects and answers are made obvious because the performers stand as they play a statement of the subject or answer, and they sit when they are finished (fig. 12).[50] If the theme is inverted, the performer stands in a different way. For instance, the flutist is instructed to "stand and bend over frontwards (so flute is upside down)" (p. 7). To one familiar with the inner workings of a fugue, this is incredibly funny. To someone who is not, however, this effect must look pretty strange, but that itself can be humorous. The wind players moan into their instruments to create creepy sound-effects in the first movement (p. 7), and this relates well to the programmatic nature of "Here Comes the Villain."

The theme "Here Comes the Villain" is used throughout the work, and with this in mind one might even be tempted to think that P.D.Q. Bach's use of motives in fugues and canons has improved over the years! In the first and last movements, the theme is the subject of a fugue. The second movement, "Sort of Little Trio Sonata," has four shorter contrasting movements within it, each featuring a varied setting of "Here Comes the Villain"; the concluding vivace section varies the theme rhythmically by setting it in $\frac{9}{8}$ time (pp. 11–12). In "Three Canons" the double bass plays the theme in counterpoint with Felix Mendelssohn's "Spring Serenade" from *Sechs Lieder ohne Worte*, op. 62, in the violin (fig. 13). "Chorale Prelude: 'Da kommt ja der Schurke'," (pp. 16–19) sets the theme in a slow tempo above a harmony that resembles the style of J.S. Bach's *Jesu Joy of Man's Desiring*. The fifth movement, "Four More Canons" (pp. 20–23), contains a major-key setting of the theme, and uses techniques similar to those noted in "Three Canons." In the concluding sixth movement, "The Grossest Fugue," the piccolo out of nowhere plays a short quote from "Yankee Doodle" (p. 29). Aside from that, the last movement treats the theme similarly to the first fugue. If this work did

49. "meshuga *adjective*: Mad, crazy; stupid." *Oxford Essential Dictionary of Foreign Terms in English.*

50. Peter Schickele, *The Musical Sacrifice (S. 50% Off) : For Flute/Piccolo, Oboe, Bassoon, Trombone (Tenor/Bass), Violin, and Contrabass* (Bryn Mawr, PA: T. Presser, 1993), 4–8, 24–36.

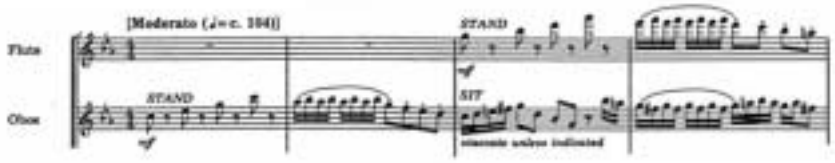

Fig. 12. From "Fuga meshuga," *The Musical Sacrifice*, p. 4 (©1993 by Theodore Presser Co., used with permission of Carl Fischer Music)

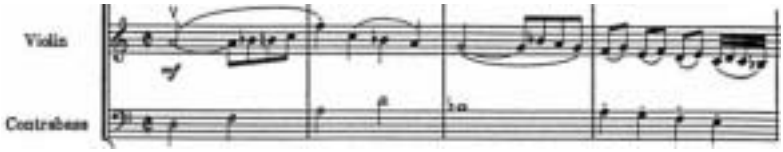

Fig. 13. From "Three Canons," *The Musical Sacrifice*, p. 13 (©1993 by Theodore Presser Co., used with permission of Carl Fischer Music)

not carry the "P.D.Q. Bach" label, its various and clever treatments of the "Here Comes the Villain" theme could be regarded as pastiche rather than satire or humor.

There are few examples of intentional musical rule breaking in *The Musical Sacrifice*. Unless meant to produce an antithetical musical style, there are no dissonant chords or musical accidents. We can see better examples of overstatements and exaggerations on individual notes in the main theme in the last movement. The violin plays a tremolo on the long note before the descending notes of the theme; the piccolo does the same, with fluttertongue on the long note (p. 24). The exaggeration of this note resembles a scream, and directly associates it with "scary" movies.

The Musical Sacrifice contains many moments of popular styles of music interspersed amongst decidedly classical styles. These mainly take the form of jazz-like melodies, chords, and muted notes. All of the smaller movements within "Sort of Little Trio Sonata" end on extended chords (pp. 9–11). The third of the "Three Canons" features a double bass jazz solo throughout the movement (fig. 14). The fourth movement is perhaps the best example of contrasting musical styles. One can infer from the title of "Chorale Prelude" that it is intended to sound Bachian. It is riddled, however, with sharply contrasting jazz styles; for instance, throughout the movement the trombone plays a plodding accompaniment with a Harmon mute to create a "wah" sound (p. 16). The bassoonist has a

Fig. 14. From "Three Canons," *The Musical Sacrifice*, p. 15 (©1993 by Theodore Presser Co., used with permission of Carl Fischer Music)

short jazz melody before the main theme returns once more before the end of the movement, and the last three measures contain a slow jazz-like chromatic scale in triplets (p. 19). The occasional blue note or short jazz melody set within a strictly classical-style piece would initially thwart the listener's expectations, and therefore it can be interpreted as funny. But because of the frequency of the jazzy insertions, the listener comes to expect them, and the effect becomes aesthetically more neutral.

Vocal Works

The Seasonings

The Seasonings (1965) is P.D.Q. Bach's earliest oratorio. The title is likely a travesty of Haydn's oratorio *The Seasons*, and can possibly allude to other famous works with "seasons" in the title, such as Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*. The comical modus operandi of this work centers around puns on individual words in the lyrics. This link between puns in the lyrics and music can work on different levels. Implicit and syncretic jokes concentrate more on individual words in the lyrics, and many of these happen to be on different herbs and spices (the plot involves a pie chef asking a soothsayer for spices). In doing this, Schickele binds these jokes loosely and cleverly back to the plot—the work is about seasonings, after all. Musical quotations provide us with the best examples of this. For instance, the soprano-alto duet "Summer Is a Cumin Seed" mocks the Reading Rota (or Summer Canon), "Sumer is icumen in" (see below). Isolated occurrences of humor in the music and text help to create deeper level puns, such as one on the note C and the word "see." More implicitly musical jokes involve dissonant chords and the instrumentation. The unusual instruments (see below) are featured in the recitatives, and play along with the rest of the orchestra in other sections, more for pure shock value than anything else. Musical accidents are used sparingly and are obvious to the listener, especially the disastrous last chord of the work.

The title does relate to the silly plot. A shepherd's-pie chef tries to buy some seasonings from a soothsayer, and whimsical hilarity ensues. The

texts relate to the plot, and there are a few interesting spots where lyrics and music come together to enhance a particular joke. In the fifth movement, "Then Asked He," the pie chef asks the soothsayer for onions and savory. The soprano and alto reply that they have none, and this leads to a long play on words concerning onions. These lyrics are set to a melodramatically slow and melancholy accompaniment.[51] This continues attacca into the a cappella choral sixth movement, "By the Leeks of Babylon," complete with sobbing during the rests (pp. 18–19). For those with perfect pitch, the pun between text and music in the aria "Open Sesame Seeds" proves titillating. The bass repeatedly sings the word "see" on the note C♮. Then at the end of the aria the seemingly coincidental correlation is consummated by singing the words "C SHARP" (fig. 15). Although these particular jokes relate directly to the lyrics, they have only an indirect relationship to the plot.

Schickele plays with word pronunciation and cathartic shouting in the text settings. A couple of good examples are in the first and eleventh movements. In the chorus "Tarragon of Virtue is Full," Schickele plays with the notion that one cannot say "virtue" without placing a "ch" sound before the second syllable. After the chorus repeats the word a couple of times, they begin to sing "choo" in the style of a train noise (pp. 6–7). This joke has little to do with the plot and everything to do with a play on words. The last movement, "To Curry Favor, Favor Curry," begins with a lot of momentum, loud dynamics, driving motor rhythms in both accompaniment and melody, and an overall triumphant air. The chorus accentuates the joyous music by shouting "Fight team! Go! Go! Yeah!" (p. 31). The chorus's statement bolsters the music—a cathartic non sequitur.

Schickele uses musical quotations to enhance verbal mockery in the lyrics. There are also musical quotations at seemingly random intervals. Some of these musical quotations are easily recognizable, while others are not. Here are some examples. The sixth movement, "By the Leeks of Babylon" (pp. 18–19), is set to "Old MacDonald Had a Farm" in the style of a church hymn. There really is no relationship between this tune and the lyrics, or the plot. A brief quote of a popular Latin song "Besamé Mucho" (p. 23) plays on the words "sesamé mucho" in the aria "Open Sesame Seeds." After the pie chef asks the forbidden seed "And who art thou?" in the recitative "So Saying," the soprano and alto reply with "I'm cumin, I'm cumin, for my head is bending low." This is a melodramatic quote of Stephen Foster's "Old Black Joe," and parodies the word

51. Peter Schickele, *The Seasonings (S. 1½ tsp.): Oratorio for Soprano, Alto, Tenor and Bass Soloists, Mixed Chorus (S.A.T.B.) and Orchestra* (Bryn Mawr, PA: T. Presser, 1973), 16–17.

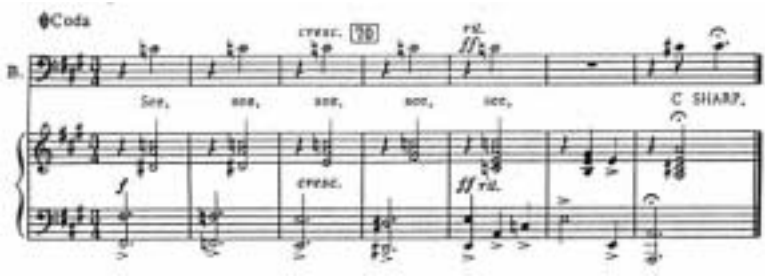

Fig. 15. From "Open Sesame Seeds," *The Seasonings*, p. 23 (used with permission of Peter Schickele)

"cumin" from "coming" in the original tune (fig. 1). Another play on "cumin" is more easily recognized in the duet "Summer is a Cumin Seed," which quotes the Reading Rota, "Sumer is icumen in" (pp. 25–28). With the exception of the Foster and Reading Rota examples, there are no direct links to the plot in the use of quotations.

Schickele throws in unusual instrumentation for pure shock value throughout *The Seasonings*. The piece is scored for S.A.T.B. soloists, mixed chorus, orchestra, and the following strange instruments: slide whistles, kazoos, foghorn, shower hose with French horn mouthpiece, tromboon (which is a trombone fitted with a bassoon bocal and reed), and accordion or chord organ, which is used in all of the recitatives as a continuo instrument.[52] The other instruments are used harmonically and melodically and play along with the rest of the orchestra. No pre-existing humorous context is necessary, as they sound totally ridiculous on their own.

Dissonant chords appear in spots where it may seem as though P.D.Q. Bach could not figure out how to resolve a cadence properly. Rather than having a direct relationship to the plot or lyrics, these chords are placed in the music to thwart the listeners' expectations. In the introduction to the first movement, the orchestra resolves to a tone cluster rather than to the dominant (p. 3). As previously shown (fig. 3), the very last chord of the piece and the resolution leading up to it are indescribable at best.

Oedipus Tex

Oedipus Tex (1985) was conceived as both an opera and an oratorio. The title is a parody on the Greek tragedy *Oedipus Rex* of Sophocles by

52. These instruments and the role of the chord organ or accordion are described in "Performance Notes," ibid., 2.

the substitution of a stereotypical cowboy name. The oratorio version contains appropriate character names, instrumentation, texts, and musical jokes. Nearly all of the jokes in this work result from the anachronistic setting of a Greek tragedy in the Old West. The relationship between text and music, staged aspects, and implicit musical jokes demonstrate this well. The texts contain western slang like "howdy" and "fellers." The music features galloping horse rhythms accentuated by temple blocks and snare-drum sticks. Instruments such as maracas, tambourine, wood blocks, and mouth siren fit in perfectly with the style of the piece. Some of the purely musical jokes also rely on the juxtaposition of country-western music with an eighteenth-century-style oratorio. The prologue, recitatives, and finale have an overall classical style, while the arias, duets, and choruses are decidedly country-western. One good example of slapstick that has little to do with the plot or the conflicting musical styles involves a strange sounding French horn solo (see below).

The oratorio is set as a cowboy drama, and this influences everything: character names, instrumentation, and musical jokes. Oedipus Tex is Oedipus Rex's younger brother, and he lives in the Old West. He marries Billie Jo Casta, the "queen of the rodeo," and finds out later from a shepherdess named Madame Peep that Billie Jo is his mother. Billie Jo Casta hangs herself, and Oedipus Tex puts out his eyes with her rhinestone barrettes (rather than the golden brooch of myth).

The most obvious jokes in this work result from the relationship between text and music, as well as some aspects of stage business. The first movement features the Greek chorus singing the word "tragedy" ad nauseum. It is a homophonic setting in C minor, with driving rhythms in the accompaniment, and an overall message of impending doom.[53] The narrator performs all of the recitatives for the oratorio version (the opera version uses spoken dialogue), and they are set in a traditionally classical manner, excepting the use of a harmonium as a continuo instrument. The recitatives contrast with the country-western styles of the arias, duets, and choruses. We see a creative response from the Greek chorus in the last recitative and the "Chorale and Finale." After Oedipus puts out his eyes, he painfully wonders what he is going to do for eyes in his predicament. The chorus answers in kind with text and tune of "The Eyes of Texas are Upon You" set to the accompaniment of J.S. Bach's *Jesu Joy of Man's Desiring* (fig. 16). Despite the country-western features of the piece, Schickele juxtaposes elements of a traditional Greek tragedy

53. Peter Schickele, *Oedipus Tex , S. 150: Dramatic Oratorio or Opera in One Cathartic Act for S.A.T.B. Chorus, Soprano, Mezzo-soprano, Tenor, and Baritone Soloists, and Orchestra* (Bryn Mawr, PA: T. Presser, 1989), 5–9.

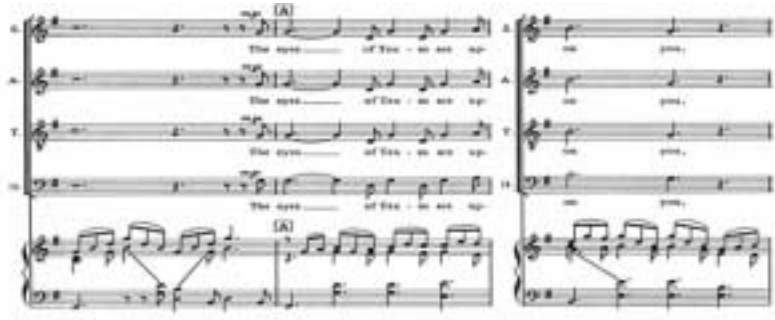

Fig. 16. From "Chorale and Finale," *Oedipus Tex*, pp. 59–60 (©1989 by Theodore Presser Co., used with permission of Carl Fischer Music)

within the performance. The chorus sings the "Prologue" and "Finale," and Schickele suggests that they wear togas or Greek peasant costumes.[54]

Another staged element features the French horn solo in each movement. The French hornist plays just a mouthpiece and funnel in the first movement, and in each subsequent movement the instrument is assembled until it is complete in the last movement.[55] There is no direct relationship between this particular theatrical bit and the plot. One can argue that this is just a use of unusual instrumentation, but as the instrument is assembled over the duration of the work, the horn solo will sound less and less strange with each movement. By the end of the work, the listener will not perceive it as an odd use of instrumentation.

As mentioned above, the prologue, recitatives, and finale all are composed in an eighteenth-century-classical style, while the arias and duets are in a country-western style. Oedipus's aria "Howdy There" begins with snare drum sticks, appropriate accompaniment, and slang in the lyrics (p. 26). Later in the movement is heard the clichéd horse hooves accompaniment (p. 31). The duet "My Heart" has all of the makings of a stereotypical country love-ballad. Oedipus starts out singing, "My heart is a hound and he's baying at you," to which Billie Jo Casta replies, "My heart is a hen and she's laying for you" (pp. 38–39). Madame Peep's aria, "You Murdered Your Father," has mariachi influences in the instrumental accompaniment (p. 46). Aside from the French horn solo, which can be perceived as purely aesthetic, the other nonclassical instruments like

54. Ibid., [3].

55. "The Horn is assembled gradually during the piece; the various parts should either be lying on the floor or in a bag next to the player, or delivered to him, one at a time, between movements, by an instrument maker." Ibid.

the tambourine, maracas, temple blocks, wood blocks, mouth siren, and keyboard harmonica enhance the western musical style and plot of this oratorio.

Summary of Analyses

These four pieces contain different approaches and techniques of creating humor. Variations exist within similarly scored compositions like the two instrumental chamber works, *Schleptet* and *The Musical Sacrifice*, and the two oratorios, *The Seasonings* and *Oedipus Tex*. In a sense, *The Musical Sacrifice* is lighthearted in nature, and contains more musically witty elements than *Schleptet*. The visual comedy present in both of these pieces serves two totally different purposes. Both pertain to musicians to a certain degree; *Schleptet* concentrates on musicians overexerting themselves, while the fugues in *The Musical Sacrifice* feature the musicians standing, sitting, or standing backwards while bending over to illustrate the subjects, answers, and inversions of the theme. Everyone gets the punch line with *Schleptet*'s fainting French horn player; only those familiar with fugues will fully understand why the performers stand and sit. The *Schleptet*'s implicit musical jokes have a slapstick nature to them, whereas *The Musical Sacrifice* does not. *The Musical Sacrifice* quotes music made familiar by its use to accompany silent horror movies, and uses it within every movement as the main thematic material. The P.D.Q. Bach music seems to have become more refined in its humor when comparing the earlier *Schleptet* (1967) with the later *Musical Sacrifice* (1977).

The two oratorios, *The Seasonings* and *Oedipus Tex*, are also very different in their comic approaches. The humorous elements of *The Seasonings* seem to be more diverse, because each occurrence is isolated, layered, and unrelated to the plot. In *Oedipus Tex*, on the other hand, it is the plot—with its contrasting time periods and its prescribed musical and theatrical styles—that carries most of the comedy. The audience may hear several funny things at once—cliché cowboy slang with horse galloping sounds, for example—but these effects tie directly into the plot. Therefore, most of these musical jokes operate on a more even plane than in *The Seasonings*. *Oedipus Tex* does pay homage to earlier P.D.Q. Bach works by scoring a French horn that is theatrically put together throughout the work. This is on par with the "tromboon" and "left-handed sewer flute" featured in the earliest P.D.Q. Bach pieces. When contrasting these two vocal works, Schickele's techniques of humor can be seen to have shifted from creating detailed, isolated, and multilevel forms of puns and slapstick to concentrating and developing one or two musical jokes throughout an entire work.

CONCLUSION

It is easy to say after looking at these four pieces and the other P.D.Q. Bach pieces mentioned earlier that the answer to the question, "Has Peter Schickele always told similar jokes in his P.D.Q. Bach music?" would be an emphatic "No." To answer the other question, "Does P.D.Q. Bach have 'early, middle, and late' periods?" is a little more difficult without a more thorough study than this current paper can provide. If considering only the four works analyzed here as evidence, the answer would seem to be "Yes." The instrumental *Schleptet* (1967) and *The Musical Sacrifice* (1977), separated by a decade, rely on different kinds of musical humor. The types of humor used in the two vocal works analyzed here—*The Seasonings* (1965) and *Oedipus Tex* (1985), separated by two decades—also differ considerably from each other. These contrasts do indicate that Schickele's musical comic style in his P.D.Q. Bach music has changed over time. This article, however, provides only a glimpse at a more definitive answer to such a question and is meant to instill readers with a different view of the music of this "last, and by all means the least" son of J.S. Bach. Further study of Peter Schickele and his P.D.Q. Bach music might include a closer chronological examination, comparison to works of other musical comedians, or comparing the humor in P.D.Q. Bach with that in Schickele's "serious" music. There are several interesting routes that can be taken in examining Schickele's use of humor in music, and it is hoped that the present article will inspire more study of it.

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