Johann Sebastian Bach

Fantasia in C major, BWV 570
for Organ

arranged for String Orchestra or String Quartet
by Alan Bonds

ABOUT THIS WORK

Description by Blair Johnston

Bach's Fantasia in C major for organ, BWV 570 is an early work, probably composed sometime during the composer's tenure as organist in the city of Arnstadt (1703 - 1706) or perhaps during his one year at Mühlhausen (1707). It is one of the few of Bach organ fantasias/organ preludes that do not belong to larger, two-part prelude-fugue or fantasia-fugue combinations; it was only with his move to Weimar, in 1708, that Bach really began to fancy such compound prelude-fugue works, though he did compose a few famous examples of them before the Weimar days (including the Toccata and Fugue in D minor, BWV 565).

BWV 570 is written in four voices to be played on two manuals without pedals. Because of this it can be (and has been) played on other keyboard instruments -- but not, it must be pointed out, to good effect, since a great deal of the piece is built around sustained tones that die all too quickly on the harpsichord or piano. Both the careful harmonic plan and the general trend of rhythmic motion -- spacious opening rhythms gradually growing more dense and active as the note values grow smaller and the motivic imitation accelerates -- presage stylistic hallmarks of Bach's mature keyboard works.

from notes by Stephen Westrop for Hyperion Records© 1997

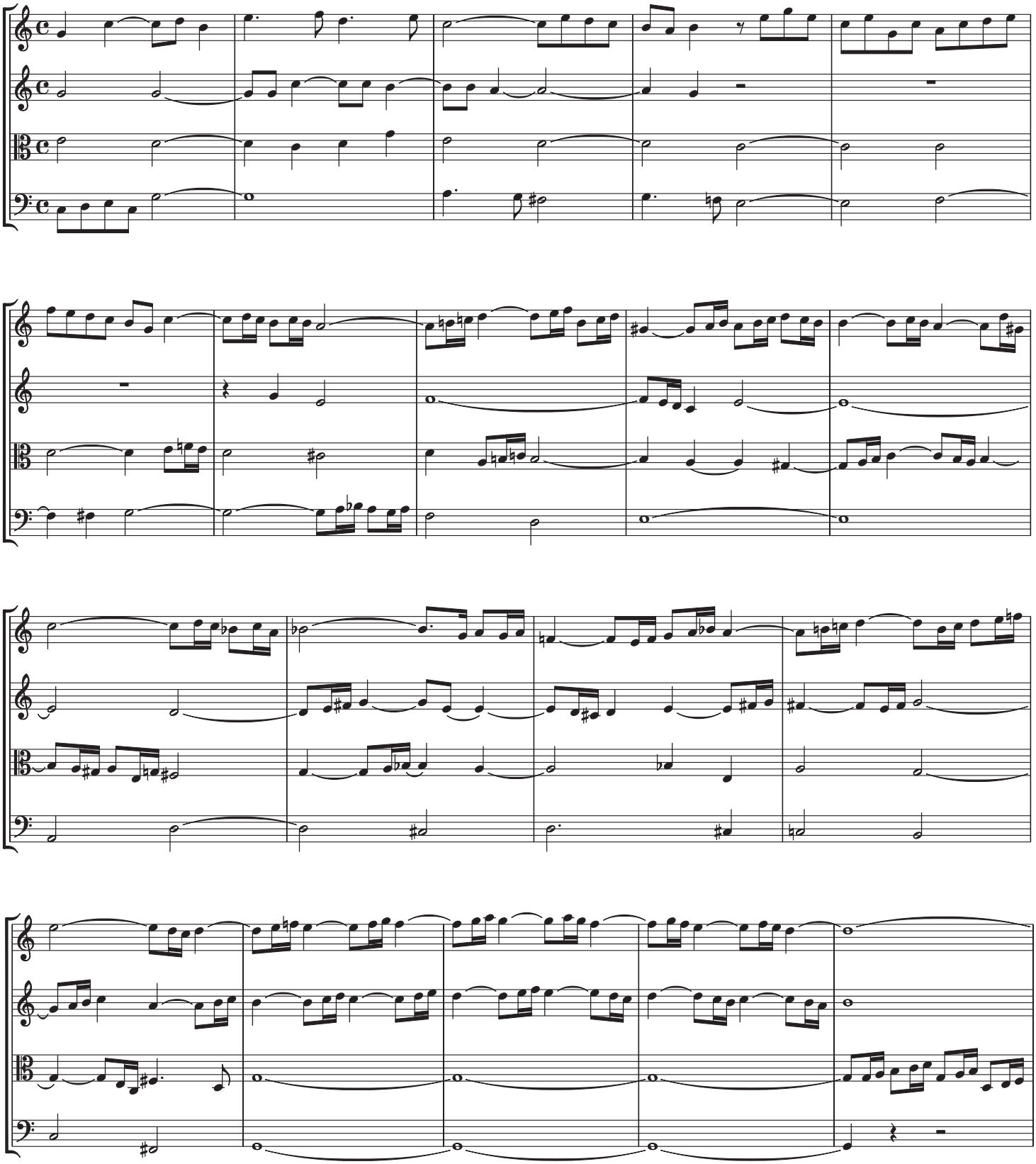
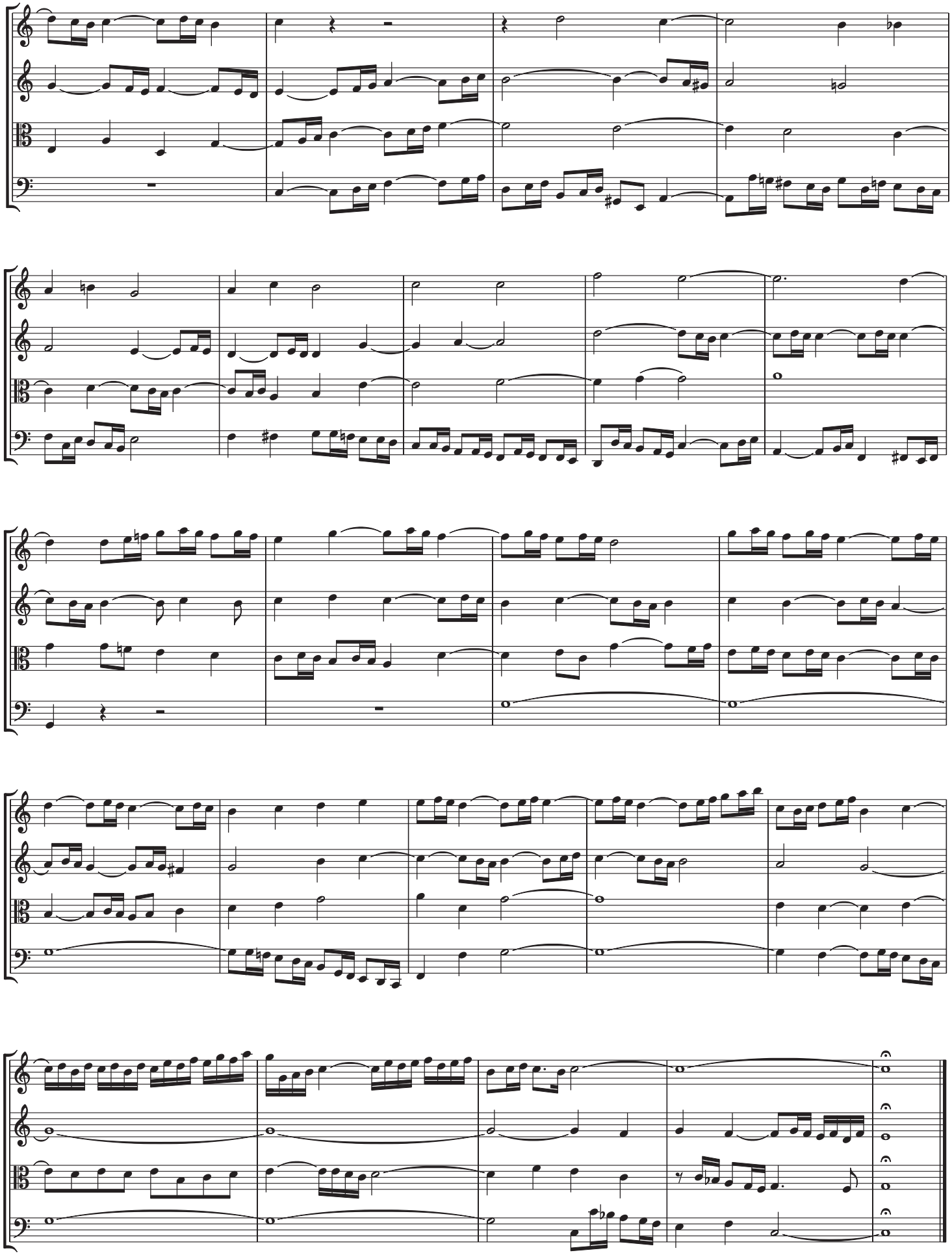
Like most organ music of the period the Fantasia in C major, BWV570 was written in two staves, raising the question whether it was written for the organ or harpsichord. Stylistic elements can play a part in the making of choices, the long pedal points suggesting similarities with the toccatas of Pachelbel, but the motivic working of the lowest part would have been unthinkable as pedal-writing in Southern Germany at the time. Ultimately the decision must be an individual and subjective one. After a brief opening, reminiscent of certain French models, the piece is dominated by the figure—quaver and two semiquavers—heard first in the sixth bar and then developed rigorously throughout the rest of the piece. Harmonic interest is maintained through brief chromatic excursions and chains of suspensions. A brief postlude, marked by a rising semiquaver figure, balances the introduction.

ABOUT THIS TRANSCRIPTION

This version is not strictly speaking an 'arrangement' but rather an almost exact 'transcription'.
It has not been bowed but generally should be played legato.

Alan Bonds,
Perth, Western Australia,
May 2023

Fantasia in C major BWV570 for organ by J.S.Bach

transcribed for strings

by A. Bonds (2023)