

THE ROYAL THEME'S HIDDEN SYMMETRY:  
IN DEFENSE OF THE CONCISE SOLUTION  
TO THE AUGMENTATION CANON  
IN J. S. BACH'S *MUSICAL OFFERING*

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It is remarkable that over two and one half centuries after its composition the fourth canon, "per Augmentationem in contrario Motu," from the *Musical Offering* does not seem to be solved to the satisfaction of all. At the heart of this problem is an indecision that appears to have arisen in the nineteenth century: When producing the solution should one augment four bars of the *dux* (source voice) to produce eight bars of the *comes* (derived voice), or should one augment the full eight bars of the *dux*, producing a sixteen-measure *comes* that is twice as long as the given voices? Through careful analysis of the extended hypothetical solution to this canon (henceforth Canon 4) it is demonstrable that Bach's intention was clear with regard to the canon's solution: The repeat signs are to be separated by eight measures, not sixteen.

The *Neue Bach-Ausgabe* under the editorship of Christoph Wolff clearly endorses the more concise solution, as solved by Johann Christoph Oley, ca. 1763.<sup>1</sup> In the critical commentary Wolff discusses and includes the longer solution first published by Alfred Dörffel in the Bach Gesellschaft edition of 1885<sup>2</sup> as well as a solution by

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<sup>1</sup>*Neue Ausgabe Sämtlicher Werke*, edited under the auspices of the Johann-Sebastian-Bach-Institut (Göttingen) and the Bach-Archiv (Leipzig), VIII/1: 49, 71; hereafter referred to as *NBA*. *Neue Bach-Ausgabe. Kritischer Bericht*, VIII/1: 75, 114; this critical commentary to the *NBA* will be referred to hereafter as *NBA KB*.

<sup>2</sup>*Johann Sebastian Bachs Werke*, edited under the auspices of the Bach-Gesellschaft (Leipzig, 1851–1899), 31.2: 9, 42, Appendix, x–xv, hereafter referred to as *BG*; *NBA KB* VIII/1, 114, 137–38.