

“Re-Instrumentation in ‘Komm, süßes Kreuz’”
Cella Westray (Northwestern University)

Additional Questions:

Liam Hynes-Tawa: Handel also uses the dotted figure to represent scourging in the middle section of “He was despised,” from Messiah. Is there any topical reason for an association of scourging with French overtures? Or could “scourging dotted rhythms” perhaps have detached enough from the French overture enough by this point that it’s almost a separate topic?

Cella Westray: That’s an interesting question and a great example from Handel. I think the way you’d likely conceptualize it within topic theory is that those two topics were originally separate and then were combined to form a trope with emergent meaning. It would be interesting to see if you could then confirm this hypothesis by looking at examples and tracing their history, though. In Bach’s Passion works the resulting meaning seems to have to do with the dichotomy between Christ as human vs. divine, particularly in the St. Matthew, which emphasizes that aspect—so that’s my speculation about why those two topics merged into a trope. It seems well-suited for that purpose in the Messiah as well.