

“Geschwinde, ihr wirbelnden Winde” BWV 201

Drama: Der Streit zwischen Phoebus und Pan¹

1. *Phoebus, Pan, Mydas, Tmolus, Mercurius, Momus:*
Geschwinde,²
Ihr wirbelnden Winde,
Auf einmal zusammen zur Höhle hinein!
Dass das hin- und widerschallen
Selbst dem Echo mag gefallen
Und den Lüften lieblich sein.

2. *Phoebus:*
Und du bist doch so unverschämt und frei,
Mir in das Angesicht zu sagen,
Dass dein Gesang
Viel herrlicher als meiner sei?

Pan:
Wie kannst du noch⁵ so lange fragen?
Der ganze Wald bewundert meinen Klang;
Das Nymphen Chor,
Das mein von mir erfundnes Rohr
Von sieben wohl gesetzten Stufen
Zum Tanzen⁶ öfters aufgerufen,
Wird dir von selbst zugestehn:
Pan singt vor allen andern schön.

Phoebus:
Vor Nymphen bist du recht;
Allein, die Götter zu vergnügen,
Ist deine Flöte viel zu schlecht.

Drama: The Contest between Phoebus and Pan

1. *Phoebus, Pan, Midas, Tmolus, Mercury, Momus:*
Hasten,
You swirling winds
At once together to the cave³ [of the winds].
So that the back-and-forth resounding [of music]
May please even Echo⁴
And be lovely to the heavens.

2. *Phoebus:*
And you are indeed so brazen and free
To say to my face
That your singing
Is much more glorious than mine?

Pan:
How can you still keep asking for so long?
The whole forest marvels at my sound;
The chorus of nymphs,
Which my pipe, invented by me,
of seven well-placed [musical] steps,⁷
Has often called to the dance,
Will in its own right tell you:
Pan sings beautifully, above all others.

Phoebus:
For [pleasing the chorus of] nymphs, you are right;
To satisfy the gods, however,
Your flute is much too simple.⁸

¹This little musical drama, whose plot is from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, is cast in the familiar Classical conceit of a competition, in this case a musical contest between Phoebus Apollo (here in his association with the lyre, fine music, and poetry) and Pan (here representing rustic music making). Other characters include Momus (censor or critic), Midas (King of Phrygia), the mountain god Tmolus (said to have judged this contest), and Mercury (a patron of music).

²“Geschwinden” is sometimes a substitute for “schwinden,” with the sense of “diminish.” Given that these are the strong winds that belong back in the cave, it is possible that this sense is intended as well.

³The reference here is to the cave on the island of Aeolia where the wind god Aeolus kept strong winds locked up.

⁴A nymph, in love with Narcissus, who must repeat the last words she hears. According to the 2nd-century Greek writer Longus, Echo rejected the advances of the god Pan.

⁵“Doch” (“yet”) in some places among the original sources.

⁶“Zu tanzen” (“to dance”) in some places among the original sources.

⁷That is, Pan's instrument, the “pan flute,” made up of bundled pipes of progressively greater lengths, is designed to produce a scale of musical “steps” (in German, “Stufen”).

⁸“Schlecht” is apparently used here in the older German sense of “schlicht” (“plain and simple,” “artless”).

Pan:
Sobald mein Ton die Luft erfüllt,
So hüpfen die Berge, so tanzt das Wild,
So müssen sich die Zweige biegen,
Und unter denen Sternen
Geht ein entzücktes Springen für:
Die Vögel setzen sich zu mir
Und wollen von mir singen lernen.

Momus:
Ei! hört mir doch den Pan,
Den grossen Meistersänger, an!

3. *Momus:*
Patron, das macht der Wind!
Dass man prahlt und hat kein Geld,
Dass man das für Wahrheit hält,
Was nur in die Augen fällt,
Dass die Toren weise sind,
Dass das Glück selber blind,
Patron, das macht der Wind!

4. *Mercurius:*
Was braucht ihr euch zu zanken?
Ihr weicht doch einander nicht.
Nach meinen wenigen Gedanken,
So wähle sich ein jeder einen Mann,
Der zwischen euch das Urteil spricht;
Lasst sehn, wer fällt euch ein?
Phoebus:

Pan:
As soon as my tune⁹ fills the air
The mountains leap,¹⁰ the wild beast dances,
The branches must bend,
And under the stars
An ecstatic skipping about goes on:
The birds perch themselves by me
And want to learn to sing from me.

Momus:
Hey, do let me listen to this Pan,
The great Meistersinger.

3. *Momus:*
Sir,¹¹ this is boasting!¹²
That one shows off but has no money,¹³
That one takes for truth
What only meets the eyes,¹⁴
That fools are wise,
That fortune itself [is] blind,¹⁵
Sir, this is boasting!

4. *Mercury:*
Why do you need to bicker?
You definitely will not yield to one another.¹⁶
According to my scant reflections,
Each one might choose a man
Who will pronounce judgment between you;
Let's see, who occurs to you?
Phoebus:

⁹In older German, “Ton” had many meanings, including “melody” or “tune.”

¹⁰In the Hebrew Bible, mountains are often said to tremble, whether in fear or joy, before God; in Psalm 114:6-7, the Luther Bibles of Bach's day read “Was war ... ihr Berge, dass ihr hüpfet wie die Lämmer? ... Für dem HERRN bebete die Erde” (“What was [it that alarmed you so], you mountains, that you leaped like lambs? ... In the face of the LORD, the earth trembled”).

¹¹The German word “Patron” has a variety of applicable senses here: “patron,” “sir,” “lord,” “master,” “protector,” “advocate,” “tutelary god.”

¹²With, of course, a pun on the “Winds” of the first movement. “Windmacherei” was a contemporary synonym for “Prahlererei” (“boasting,” “bragging,” “showing off”).

¹³German adage: “Prahlen ist kein Geld” (“showing off is not money”); possibly also Cicero, “iactantem esse in pecunia” (“mit seinem Geld prahlen” [“showing off about his money”]).

¹⁴Possibly a reference to “Augen lügen nicht” (“eyes do not lie”)?

¹⁵German adage: “Das Glück ist blind” (“fortune is blind”); Latin, “fortuna caeca est.”

¹⁶The original sources variously provide a period or a comma at the end of this line, or give a punctuation mark that might be read as a comma or a period.

Der Tmolus soll mein Richter sein,

Pan:

Und Mydas sei auf meiner Seite.

Mercurius:

So tretet her, ihr lieben Leute,

Hört alles fleissig an

Und merket, wer das Beste kann!

5. *Phoebus:*

Mit Verlangen

Drück ich deine zarten Wangen,

Holder, schöner Hyacinth.

Und dein Augen küsst ich gerne,

Weil sie meine Morgensterne

Und der Seelen Sonne sind.

6. *Momus:*

Pan, rücke deine Kehle nun

In wohlgestimmte Falten!

Pan:

Ich will mein Bestes tun

Und mich noch herrlicher als Phoebus halten.

7. *Pan:*

Zu Tanze, zu Sprunge, so wackelt das Herz.

Wenn der Ton zu mühsam klingt

Und der Mund gebunden singt,

So erweckt es keinen Scherz.

8. *Mercurius:*

Nunmehr Richter her!

Tmolus shall be my judge,

Pan:

And let Midas be on my side.

Mercury:

So step this way, you dear people;

Listen diligently to everything

And note who can do the best.

5. *Phoebus:*

With longing

I press your tender cheeks [to mine],

Graceful, beautiful Hyacinth.¹⁷

And I gladly kiss your eyes,

Because they are my morning stars¹⁸

And the sun of my soul.¹⁹

6. *Momus:*

Pan, flex your throat²⁰ now

In beautifully-voiced²¹ nuances.²²

Pan:

I will do my best

And acquit myself still more gloriously than Phoebus.

7. *Pan:*

By dance, by skip—then the heart flutters.

If the tune²³ sounds too labored

And the mouth sings constricted,²⁴

Then this stirs up no merriment.

8. *Mercury:*

Now at last, judges, [step] this way!

¹⁷A young man beloved of Phoebus Apollo, who caused his death with a discus, either accidentally or by the intervention of one of the jealous wind gods.

¹⁸Morning stars are planets like Venus—note that Amor, the Roman god of love, is the son of Venus—which rise before the sun does.

¹⁹Usually it was God's word, or Jesus, that was called "der Seelen Sonne" ("the sun of the soul").

²⁰Here probably with double meaning of "Kehle" as "throat" (Pan's voice) and as "pipe" (Pan's "flute"); "Luftröhre" (the "windpipe" within the throat, the instrument for singing and speaking) could be used as a synonym for "Kehle."

²¹"Wohlgestimmt" can mean "well-tuned" (i.e., producing pitches accurately) or "blessed with lovely voice" (i.e., producing sounds beautifully), or both.

²²In older German, "Falten" or "Faltungen" was sometimes used as a synonym for "Nuancen" ("nuances").

²³See fn. 9, above.

²⁴Perhaps with a pun on the "gebundene Schreibart" ("strict/bound [contrapuntal] style [of music]"), especially given the likelihood that this would all have been heard as an allegory of high and low poetic/musical styles.

Tmolus:
Das Urteil fällt mir gar nicht schwer;
Die Wahrheit wird es selber sagen,
Dass Phoebus hier den Preis davongetragen.
Pan singet vor dem Wald,
Die Nymphen kann er wohl ergötzen;
Jedoch, so schön als Phoebus Klang erschallt,
Ist seine Flöte nicht zu schätzen.

9. *Tmolus:*
Phoebus, deine Melodei
Hat die Anmut selbst geboren.
Aber wer die Kunst versteht,
Wie dein Ton verwundernd geht,
Wird dabei aus sich verloren.

10. *Pan:*
Komm, Mydas, sage du nun an,
Was ich getan!

Mydas:
Ach, Pan! wie hast du mich gestärkt,
Dein Lied hat mir so wohl geklungen,
Dass ich es mir auf einmal gleich gemerkt.
Nun geh ich hier im Grünen auf und nieder
Und lern es denen Bäumen wieder.
Der Phoebus macht es gar zu bunt,
Allein, dein allerliebster Mund
Sang leicht und ungezwungen.

11. *Mydas:*
Pan ist Meister, lasst ihn gehn!
Phoebus hat das Spiel verloren,

Tmolus:
The judgment strikes me as not at all difficult;
Truth will tell you it herself:
That Phoebus has carried away the prize here.
Pan sings before the forest;
He can well delight the nymphs.
Nevertheless, when Phoebus's sound rings out so
beautifully,²⁵
His [Pan's] flute is not to be esteemed.

9. *Tmolus:*
Phoebus, your melody
Has borne charm itself.²⁶
But whoever understands art,
How your tune²⁷ proceeds, astonishing [the hearer],
Will lose himself thereby.

10. *Pan:*
Come, Midas, declare now [the merit of]
What I have done.

Midas:
Ah, Pan! How you have invigorated me;
To me, your song sounded out so well
That I learned it immediately, at once.
Now I will go to and fro here in the greenwood²⁸
And teach²⁹ it in turn to the trees.³⁰
Phoebus makes it [his singing] really too extravagant;
Your dearest mouth, however,
Sang easily and unforced.

11. *Midas:*
Pan is the champion, let him be off [to his forest and
nymphs]!³¹

²⁵The logic of “so schön als Phoebus Klang erschallt” (on the face of it: “as beautifully as Phoebus's sound rings out”) is apparently to be read as “als Phoebus Klang so schön erschallt” (“when Phoebus's sound rings out so beautifully”).

²⁶“Melodei” (“melody”) is most probably the subject and “Anmut” (“charm”) the object; but grammatically, at least, “Anmut” could be the subject and “Melodei” the object.

²⁷See fn. 9, above.

²⁸Here “im Grünen” apparently means “im grünen Wald” (“in the green forest,” “in the greenwood,” i.e., in a forest that is in leaf).

²⁹In older German, “lernen” (strictly speaking, “to learn”) was sometimes used colloquially in place of “lehren” (“to teach”). For example, in Exodus 4:15 some Luther Bibles have God saying to Moses, “Ich will euch lernen, was ihr tun sollt,” whereas the standard reading was “Ich will euch lehren, was ihr tun sollt” (“I will teach you [Moses and Aaron] what you shall do”).

³⁰Midas will imitate Orpheus, who enchanted the trees and animals with his lyre-playing.

³¹See also lines 1–2 of movement 14.

Denn nach meinen beiden Ohren
Singt er unvergleichlich schön.

Phoebus has lost the match,
For according my two ears
He [Pan] sings incomparably beautifully.

12. *Momus*:

Wie, Mydas, bist du toll?

Mercurius:

Wer hat dir den Verstand verrückt?

Tmolus:

Das dacht ich wohl, dass du so ungeschickt!

Phoebus:

Sprich, was ich mit dir machen soll?

Verkehr ich dich in Raben,

Soll ich dich schinden oder schaben?

Mydas:

Ach! plaget mich doch nicht so sehre,

Es fiel mir ja

Also in mein Gehöre.

Phoebus:

Sieh da,

So sollst du Eselsohren haben!

Mercurius:

Das ist der Lohn

Der tollen Ehrbegierigkeit.

Pan:

Ei! warum hast du diesen Streit

Auf leichte Schultern übernommen?

Mydas:

Wie ist mir die Kommission

So schlecht bekommen!

13. *Mercurius*:

Aufgeblasne Hitze,

Aber wenig Grütze

Kriegt die Schellenmütze

12. *Momus*:

What, Midas, are you crazy?

Mercury:

Who has deranged your understanding?

Tmolus:

This I sure thought: that you [are] so inept!

Phoebus:

Speak, what shall I do with you?

[Shall] I turn you into a raven?³²

Shall I flay or skin you?³³

Midas:

Ah, just do not pester me so much;

Yes, to my sense of hearing,

It [the match] struck³⁴ me this way.

Phoebus:

See here,

Then you shall have donkey's ears!

Mercury:

That is the wages

Of crazed lusting after honor.

Pan:

Hey, why have you [Midas] taken up

This [weighty] contest [as if] onto easy shoulders?³⁵

Midas:

How the assignment [to judge this contest] has

So badly disagreed with me!

13. *Mercury*:

In the end, puffed-up ardour

But scant groats [in the head—brainpower]³⁶

Gets the fool's cap

³²Crows and ravens were associated with Apollo.

³³In contest, Apollo had demonstrated the adaptability of his instrument, the lyre, by turning it around and playing it backwards; when Marsyas, a satyr, was unable to do the same on his instrument, the aulos (a woodwind instrument of ancient Greece, formerly thought to be a kind of flute, but now known to have been a kind of oboe), he was flayed alive.

³⁴“Fiel” (“fell”) here is apparently a clipped version of “befiel” (“befell”).

³⁵Alluding, presumably, to the saying “Auf fremden Schultern ist leicht tragen” (“On another person's shoulders is easy carrying”).

³⁶In Bach's day, the colloquial expression “Grütze im Kopfe haben” (literally, “to have groats/wheat in the head”) was applied to people deemed smart, whereas the expression “Spreu/Häckerling im Kopfe haben” (“to have chaff in the head”) was applied to people deemed stupid.

Endlich aufgesetzt.
Wer das Schiffen nicht versteht
Und doch an das Ruder geht,
Ertrinket mit Schaden und Schanden zuletzt.

14. *Momus*:
Du guter Mydas, geh nun hin
Und lege dich in deinem Walde nieder,
Doch tröste dich in deinem Sinn,
Du hast noch mehr dergleichen Brüder.
Der Unverstand und Unvernunft
Will jetzt der Weisheit Nachbar sein,
Man urteilt in den Tag hinein,
Und die so tun,
Gehören all in deine Zunft.
Ergreife, Phoebus, nun
Die Leier wieder,
Es ist nichts lieblicher
Als deine Lieder.³⁷

15. *Phoebus, Pan, Mydas, Tmolus, Mercurius, Momus*:
Labt das Herz, ihr holden Saiten,
Stimmt Kunst und Anmut an!
Lasst euch meistern, lasst euch höhnen,
Sind doch euren süßen Tönen
Selbst die Götter zuetan.

Christian Friedrich Henrici

Placed on [one's head].
Whoever does not understand steering
Yet takes the helm anyway
Drowns, ultimately, in harm and shame.

14. *Momus*:
Good Midas, now go there
And retreat to your forest,
But be comforted in your mind:
You have still more brothers of the same ilk.
At present, unintelligence and unreason
Want to be wisdom's neighbor;
People will judge [with unintelligence] all the day,
And those who do so
Are all numbered among your guild.
Phoebus, now take up
The lyre again;
There is nothing lovelier
Than your songs.

15. *Phoebus, Pan, Midas, Tmolus, Mercurius, Momus*:
Refresh the heart, you graceful strings [of the lyre];
Give voice to art and charm.
You may be censured, you may be mocked;
Yet to your sweet tunes
The gods themselves are devoted.

(transl. Michael Marissen and Daniel R. Melamed)



Scan or go to www.bachcantatatexts.org/BWV201 for an annotated translation

³⁷Revisions in some of the original sources point to a (planned) reperformance with a slightly altered text in this movement. In the original performing part, the last four lines at first read as given above, but were later changed to: “Verdopple, Phoebus, nun / Musik und Lieder, / Tobt gleich Hortensius und ein / Orbil darwider” (“Redouble, Phoebus, now [your] music and songs; even though immediately Hortensius and an Orbilius rants against them”). In a 1749 handwritten libretto, the last three lines at first read as given above in the main text, but then were changed by Bach to “... tobt gleich Hortensig und ein Orbil darwider,” and later this revision was changed further to “... tobt gleich Borilig [revised in turn to “Biolilig”] und ein Hortensig darwider” (“even though immediately Birolius and a Hortensius rants against them”); this second layer of revision was not carried over into Bach’s performing part, whose musical setting would have required changes to accommodate the new wording. Hortensius was a great orator, a contemporary of Cicero; and Orbilius [given here as “Birolius”], the grammarian, was a teacher of Horace.