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# The Gothic Bach*

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In Episode 27 of the *Inspector Morse* mysteries, 'The Day of the Devil' (1993), a priest (played by Richard Griffiths) is summoned to his church in the middle of the night by the sound of organ music. As he walks to the church, the cascading melodies of J. S. Bach's Toccata and Fugue in D minor (BWV 565) thunder through the hollow darkness. The organist is John Peter Barrie (played by Keith Allen), a satanist, rapist and murderer who has escaped from custody and is looking for vengeance. The scene, of course, ends far from happily, as the priest finds one of Barrie's traumatised victims in the same sacred space that should safeguard those who enter it from such atrocities.

This scene does not achieve its chilling effect by what it shows, but by what it keeps from the viewer. We do not *see* violence, murder or blood, but are led to *feel* that something is very wrong. The dim moonlight and blue-ish colours, the images of the empty church interior, and, most impressively, the bombastic music echoing through the dark night: all of these forebode and suggest, but never actualise the occult terror that pervades the atmosphere. By *Inspector Morse* standards this scene is unusually terrifying, but simultaneously unusually clichéd. All too often, cinema has presented us with the arcane desecrating the holy and we have heard evildoers play the organ in horror films. The use of well-known formulae to express themes of implicit uncanniness and transgression is characteristic of what has been called the 'literature of terror', the Gothic.[1] This mode of writing found its way into the cinema in the early twentieth century, and from there to the television screen, popular music and the game console: in all of these we encounter the same motifs of arched windows, of supernatural presence, and of supremely spooky music.

Spooky music is one thing, some readers might say at this point, but Johann Sebastian Bach's music is another. Bach's music is masterful, high-cultural, liturgical, above suspicion: yet Gothic movies seem to use his work more than that of other composers. How, when and why did Bach become Gothic?

* This article quotes sections from my book *Gothic Music: The Sounds of the Uncanny*. Gothic Literary Studies (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2012).

1 David Punter, *Literature of Terror. A History of Gothic Fictions from 1765 to the Present Day* (London: Longman, 1980).

## Bach and the dark side

Although Bach's authorship of the Toccata and Fugue in D minor is contested in scholarly circles,[2] popular imagination universally ascribes it to him. The piece has become a well-known—and worn-out—convention in horror films and television soundtracks, horror and fantasy video games, and even mobile phone ringtones. The musician who is studied by most musicologists as a representative of baroque composition and Lutheran theology is therefore actively linked to cultural phenomena that seem to have nothing whatsoever to do with him. In the opening sequence of Walt Disney's *Fantasia* (1940), the Toccata and Fugue is played by a full orchestra and, with the help of imaginative lighting effects, used to produce the effect of an impressive sunrise. With that notable exception, the piece has predominantly been used in horror films. An early example is Edgar G. Ulmer's *The Black Cat* (1934), in which Boris Karloff plays it for Bela Lugosi. As both these actors became famous through film adaptations of classic Gothic novels, *Frankenstein* (Mary Shelley, 1818) and *Dracula* (Bram Stoker, 1897) respectively, the Toccata and Fugue became associated with Gothic and horror from an early date. Many other productions followed, from the film noir *Sunset Blvd.* (Billy Wilder 1950) to horror blockbuster *Gremlins 2: The New Batch* (Joe Dante 1990): all of these use this baroque organ composition as a mood setter for the eerie, the ominous, the uncanny.

The earliest, and perhaps most striking, cinematic use of the Toccata and Fugue in D minor occurs in Rouben Mamoulian's 1932 adaptation of another Victorian Gothic novel, *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (Robert Louis Stevenson, 1886). This film is interesting, among other things, for its exploration of the ways in which music can contribute to the haunting and border-crossing of the Gothic genre. Not only do the opening and final scenes feature an orchestral arrangement of the Toccata, Bach's work also plays a more direct role in Mamoulian's rendering of Jekyll/Hyde's monstrous dual nature. Dr Jekyll is depicted as a real gentleman: he is eloquent, well-mannered, and chaste with his girlfriend. He also has pronounced musical talents. After the opening credits and the Toccata, the very first shot of the film shows him playing Bach's Chorale Prelude 'Ich ruf zu dir, Herr Jesu Christ' (BWV 639) on his house organ. As musicality in film tends to be equated with sensitivity and humanity, traits not generally ascribed to monsters and villains, the doctor's love of music is to be taken as an emphatic signifier of his un-monstrous nature. The two foremost signs of Dr Jekyll's humanity are his chastity and his musicality, and the evil doppelganger Hyde's lack of such human qualities is expressed by his killing of music hall singer Ivy. When Hyde dies and is transformed back into Dr Jekyll at the end of the film, the last bars of the Toccata are played by the orchestra. While the Toccata in D minor provides a musical frame for this movie, a few bars from the middle of the Fugue are played by Dr Jekyll in a central scene in the middle of

[2] Peter Williams, 'BWV 565: A Toccata in D Minor for Organ by J. S. Bach?', *Early Music*, 9/3 (1981), 330–37. While aware of the controversy surrounding its authorship, I shall refer to the work as 'Bach's' here for convenience's sake.

the film.[3] Dr Jekyll has just heard that he is allowed to marry his Muriel, returns home, and, after quoting Shakespeare's dictum that 'music be the food of love', sits down and plays Bach's Fugue on the organ. The doctor's performance is manic, highly erotic, and clearly transgressive, which is visualised by his ecstatically throwing his head back and the superimposition of Greek statues and fires.

This important scene shows how film music can provide unseen information for the viewer. Kevin Donnelly argues that musical allusions acquire a ghostly dimension in movie soundtracks, serving as a 'repository of reminders, half-memories and outbursts of emotion and the illogical [,] these "ghosts" and "memories" that can haunt a film'.[4] Various musical hauntings converge in this scene. First, there are the associations of the instrument itself. Organs, in the cinema or in other contexts, always evoke not only sacred music, but also places such as churches and cathedrals, near crypts and graveyards; and the organist has mastery over the mighty sound that echoes these allusions. The organ thus serves as a meta-cinematic comment that is distinctly Gothic in taste. For this reason it has acquired a firm place within the generic design of horror films.[5] The spooky organ and the diabolical organist have become a standard trope in cinema—evident even in comedies such as Blake Edwards' *Pink Panther* films, in which Chief Inspector Dreyfus manically plays the organ—and in other forms of popular culture. The favourite tune of murderous psychopaths and mad scientists is, of course, Bach's Toccata and Fugue in D minor: unlike any of the other horror soundtrack classics, this piece occurs almost exclusively as diegetic music, played by an on-screen character, rather than as part of the non-diegetic film score which only the film audience can hear.

Secondly, the spectre of Bach himself is present in this scene. Educated listeners will recognise his compositional style or the specific compositions; to listeners who are less well-versed in classical music, the sound of the organ evokes Bach, the most well-known organ composer. The implications of Bach's style and the organ's sound become entangled and projected onto the organist seen on screen, the tormented Dr Jekyll. The result is an uncanny mixed bag: Bach the composer of sacred music that is as virtuous as the chaste lover Jekyll; Bach the musical superhuman who could play and compose things so complicated they nearly surpass human intellect, just like Jekyll's potion; but also the composer of sacred music who spent his days in gloomy churches; Bach the insanely intelligent genius; Bach playing that supremely spooky instrument, the organ; Bach the undead master haunting generations of musicians ... and so the very sign of Dr Jekyll's human sensitivity, his musical talent, becomes disconcertingly inverted. The combination of the impressive, showy toccata and

3 For an overview of the precise bars of music used in this film see Neil Lerner, 'The Strange Case of Rouben Mamoulian's Sound Stew: The Uncanny Soundtrack in *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1931)' in Neil Lerner (ed.), *Music in the Horror Film: Listening to Fear* (London: Routledge, 2010), pp. 55–79.

4 Kevin Donnelly, *The Spectre of Sound: Music in Film and Television* (London: British Film Institute, 2005), p. 21.

5 Cf. Julie Brown, 'Carnival of Souls and the Organs of Horror' in Lerner (ed.), *Music in the Horror Film*, p. 17.

the chorale with its desperate calling for help turn the doctor's musical pastime into something Gothic, the transgressive locus of a mad genius' hubris.

Not only has the consistent use of the Toccata and Fugue in D minor in horror films and television given this piece a Gothic flavour, the composer himself has developed a certain Gothic identity. Given that Bach's cultural and religious background are mostly unfamiliar to a (secular) general audience, this is not altogether surprising. Bach composed music for texts that at times seem grotesque to modern audiences—many of them would not look out of place in a horror story. After all, one of his most famous pieces is a warm, loving chorale addressed to a head 'covered with blood and wounds' ('O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden' from the St Matthew Passion, BWV 244); he composed an entire cantata describing a heart that 'swims in blood' and whose owner wishes to 'sink' herself into someone else's 'deep wounds' (cantata *Mein Herze schwimmt in Blut*, BWV 199); and, let's face it, these are *a dead person's* deep wounds ... Bach's composing style for the expression of such texts, as for instance the 'Erbarm es Gott' recitative and the 'Sind Blitze, sind Donner' chorus from the St Matthew Passion illustrate, is no less graphic and intense than the texts themselves. What baroque theology endorsed as the 'healing shock' of sacred tragedy[6] appears as plain shock to audiences who are less familiar with Lutheran devotional practice and the baroque aesthetic of cruelty, which resulted in vivid depictions of all the horrors of the passion.

Apart from the gloomy nostalgia of old churches, Bach's music and person also connote Germany, the country with perhaps the darkest of histories. In popular culture, a certain inherent Gothicism is often attributed to Germany, an association which has evolved from a combination of factors. The German *Schauerroman* was an important precursor of the Gothic novel, which, although tremendously popular with British readers, was heavily frowned upon in eighteenth-century England. These German ghost stories were regarded as evidence of the 'depravity of taste' of the Germans, a form of 'poison' that 'threatened the health of the British national body'.[7] The link between Germany and the Gothic was further consolidated in the twentieth century. German expressionism has had a lasting influence on international horror cinema, leading to a visual idiom of terror of explicitly German origin.[8] Finally, with two wars, an internal separation and a not immediately successful reunification, the events of the twentieth century have completed Germany's embodiment of Gothic trauma,

6 On the usage of tragedy theory in baroque meditations of the Passion, see Isabella van Elferen, *Mystical Love in the German Baroque: Theology, Poetry, Music* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2008), pp. 100–108.

7 Barry Murnane, 'Envenomed Crucibles. Transfer, Translation and the Creation of German Gothic around 1800'. Unpublished conference paper quoted with author's permission, p. 8.

8 The first Dracula film, *Nosferatu: Eine Symphonie des Grauens* (Friedrich Murnau, 1922), was made in Germany; other films such as *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (Robert Wiene, 1920) had similar impact on the development of horror cinema. Cf. Misha Kavka, 'The Gothic on screen' in Jerold Hogle (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 214–19.

excess and uncanniness.[9] These factors together have led to an appropriation of Teutonic culture by the Goth subculture. The scene's seminal band, Bauhaus, named itself after a German school in architecture; early scene icons like Nina Hagen and Velvet Underground's Nico were German, while Goth artists like David Bowie and Nick Cave lived in Berlin; Siouxsie Sioux and others insert German lines in their lyrics; and many of the scene's most celebrated current artists, from Blutengel, Helium Vola, Sopor Æternus and the Ensemble of Shadows to Rammstein and :wumpscut:, are German. The world's largest Goth lifestyle and music festival, the Wave-Gotik-Treffen, takes place in Bach's hometown Leipzig, and the local Bach Society cooperates with the festival organisers in creating a Gothic concert programme.[10] Thus Bach's Gothic potential is embedded in the simple fact of his German nationality.

With so many explicit and implicit links to Gothic heritage, Bach's music has gradually been used more extensively in Gothic and horror cinema. The Cello Suites, for instance, are heard expressing the vampiric transgression of the limits of life and death in Tony Scott's *The Hunger* (1983), and the Goldberg Variations accompany Hannibal Lecter's unlikely and extremely gruesome escape from a high security prison in Memphis in *The Silence of the Lambs* (Jonathan Demme, 1991). The Gothic Bach also pervades more obscure and even less historicising corners of popular culture. An artist called Count Bachula presents himself as: 'the not so great, great, great … great uncle of the famous composer J. S. Bach—on the Transylvania side of the family. After a hearty meal, I enjoy playing the Mighty Pipe Organ at my castle.' This artist brought out a *Gothic Christmas* organ and harpsichord CD (2008), which includes tracks like 'Silent Fright' and 'Auld Fang Syne'. Even more remarkably, the number of Bach Halloween CDs is overwhelming, with titles ranging from *A Bach Halloween* volumes 1, 2 and 3 to *Bach's Dark Side for Halloween* and *Bach from the Dead*. All of these CDs feature the Toccata and Fugue in D minor; I would argue that the insistent ascription of this composition to Bach might be as much a *result* of the composer's Gothic reverberations as the other way around.

It would be easy to discard these notions of Bach's Gothicism in a grand sweep of cultural pessimism, and it is easy to think of a number of possible objections to them from that perspective: how ill-informed popular imagination is, and aren't we scholars lucky to know the real Bach. However, Bach has also been associated with Gothic in more 'highbrow' contexts. A concert review in the *Chicago Tribune*, for instance, described 'the Gothic Bach of great vaulted arches and heaven-climbing spires'.[11] Bach's Gothic potential is assessed in even more gloomy imagery in scholarly research. Richard Taruskin, for instance, discusses 'Bach's dark vision': 'His works persuade us—no, *reveal* to us—that the world is filth and

[9] Cf. Isabella van Elferen, 'East German Goth and the Specters of Marx', *Popular Music*, 30/1 (2011), 89–103.

[10] Wave-Gotik-Treffen [festival website], http://www.wave-gotik-treffen.de, accessed 13 January 2012.

[11] Cited from David J. Grossman, Dave's J. S. Bach Page, http://www.jsbach.net/quiz28.html, accessed 16 January 2012.

horror, that humans are helpless, that life is pain, that reason is a snare'.[12] But surely...

Before we discard anything, we must interrogate it, and so my question is: how can we read and understand Bach's Gothic reverberations with such varied audiences? It is my hypothesis that the kinship goes further than mere stylistics or general associations. In what follows, I shall explore the historical and cultural significance of the Gothic, the role of music in the genre, and the ways in which Bach's music could be understood in relation to those aspects of Gothic.

## Gothic history

Gothic literature originated in the late eighteenth century, within decades of Bach's death, as a reaction to the rationalism of the Enlightenment. Gothic revolves around the empty spaces, hauntings and psychological destabilisation of the ghost story. Empty spaces such as deserted ruins, bleak landscapes, urban labyrinths, or the endless void of cyberspace furnish the settings for these stories, spooky spaces haunted by various spectres. In his handbook on Gothic history, Fred Botting argues that Gothic tales about such irrational phenomena as ghosts, vampires, and phantasms can be understood as:

> attempts to explain what the Enlightenment left unexplained, efforts to reconstruct the divine mysteries that reason had begun to dismantle, to recuperate pasts and histories that offered a permanence and unity in excess of the limits of rational [...] order.[13]

The language of the Gothic novel, like its content, was sentimental, verging on the tacky, excessive in its literary edifice. The stories were set in a past imagined as wild, barbaric, rich in those supernatural and irrational qualities that the Enlightenment lacked—the Gothic Middle Ages. So vivid were these fantasies of the Gothic genre, and so popular, that medieval Gothic architecture experienced a sudden increase in popularity; the most famous example of the eighteenth-century Gothic revival is the architectural fantasy of ghost story author Horace Walpole's house in Strawberry Hill, Twickenham. The Gothic mode remained popular throughout the Victorian age, when Charles Dickens' *Christmas Carol* (1843) and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) were written. It then became a popular subject for early cinema and, later on, television and video games.[14] Since the late 1970s, Gothic has been the inspiration for a musical subculture, Goth. Goths embody the ghosts that appear in such twilight zones, which are recreated in the lush settings of Goth club night. Their elaborate costumes may represent a variety of Gothic spectres, ranging from modern vampires and Byronic heroes, to horror

[12] Richard Taruskin, *Text and Act: Essays on Music and Performance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 307 and 310.

[13] Fred Botting, *Gothic* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 23.

[14] On Gothic in early cinema, see Robert Spadoni, *Uncanny Bodies: The Coming of Sound Film and the Origins of the Horror Genre* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); on Gothic television, see Helen Wheatley, *Gothic Television* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006); on Gothic videogames, see Fred Botting, *Limits of Horror: Technology, Bodies, Gothic* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008).

movie stars and futuristic cyborgs.[15] In more recent years, Gothic has become a sightseeing experience: ghost tours offered in cities such as Edinburgh, Dublin and London offer tourists meetings with 'real' spectres in the towns' haunted places.

Gothic is thematically characterised by the crossing of boundaries and the exploration of limits: its stories unfold in the grey areas between the physical and the spiritual, the human and the divine, life and death. It creates a radicalised liminality characterised by the destabilising force of pervasive ambivalence. The effect of this ambivalence is notable within Gothic fictions, which also draw their audiences into the twilight zones they sketch. Gothic performativity—its effects and affects—leaves readers, viewers and listeners as haunted by the ghosts of the repressed as the characters they read about, see and hear.

Through the delights of terror, spectral appearances and transgressions, Gothic offers its readers and viewers a form of cultural critique. The Gothic ghost story addresses the anxiety that sets in when familiar values are exchanged for the borderland of the unseen unheard and unknown. The spaces of Gothic can be read as personal and cultural mindscapes, in which undead presences signify the unprocessed traumas or unconscious obsessions of persons, historical periods or cultures. Wandering around in the liminal spaces between such opposites as past and present, life and death, good and evil, the characters in Gothic tales confront their own and their audience's latent fears and desires regarding such dichotomies. The spectres and ghosts which appear in these spaces represent what Sigmund Freud analyses as the return of repressed desire or anxiety, which give us the uneasy feeling that our home—that is, the domestic sphere, our perception of identity, consciousness, culture—has become unhomely (*unheimlich*), uncanny.[16] The shockingly unsafe church in Inspector Morse's *Day of the Devil* is a typical example of such an 'unhomely' home. Gothic ostentatiously pushes the Freudian uncanny into the audience's face, demanding it confront its own spectres. Like the portrait of Dorian Gray, it offers a dark mirror image that one would rather not see, exposing the inevitable return of the repressed within the here, the now, the self. The critical gesture of Gothic thus revolves around the unveiling of unspeakable presences lurking beneath the well-organised surfaces of self and society, giving those presences the unpleasantly anthropomorphic role of ghosts.

## Gothic music

In *Gothic Music: The Sounds of the Uncanny*[17] I chart the role of music in Gothic literature, film, TV, video games, and subculture. The book identifies four

[15] Cf. Paul Hodkinson, *Goth: Identity, Style and Subculture* (Oxford: Berg, 2002), pp. 35–64; Catherine Spooner, *Fashioning Gothic Bodies* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), pp. 159–99.

[16] Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny' (1919) in *Sigmund Freud: The Uncanny,* translated by David McLintock with an introduction by Hugh Haughton (New York: Penguin, 2003). Cf. Terry Castle, *The Female Thermometer: Eighteenth-Century Culture and the Invention of the Uncanny* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

[17] Van Elferen, *Gothic Music: The Sounds of the Uncanny (*see the opening note on p. 9).

dimensions in the functionality of Gothic music: (1) giving voices to spectral beings; (2) the evocation of memories and emotions haunting the sound of music; (3) creating a musical counterpart to what Botting calls Gothic's 'writing of excess';[18] (4) inducing the border-crossings that Gothic thematises. I will focus here on the second and fourth dimensions of Gothic music in relation to Bach, those of musical haunting and border-crossing.

### *Musical haunting*

Music, with its powerful relation to human memory and emotion, allows past associations to reappear in the present of each listening experience. Hearing familiar music brings back the circumstances of former listening experiences; even in the case of previously unheard music, a melodic curve, a rhythm, or a vocal timbre can work as a Proustian *mémoire involontaire* that inescapably evokes such associations. Musical experience always generates an overlap of past and present: it allows long-forgotten feelings, persons, or knowledge to reappear suddenly as if they had never been lost. Some of the emotions and memories evoked by music may be discomforting—they may concern feelings or situations that would have better remained buried in the past—but music's spectral performativity is hard to avoid or indeed escape. The ears, unlike the eyes, cannot simply be closed. The listener, as a result, *must* hear, *must* be haunted by the spectral voice of the returning repressed. According to Lawrence Kramer music is: 'about revisitation, about the experience [...] of the uncanny', a form of ghostly narration.[19]

Music thus shares with spectrality the doubling, mirroring quality of the revenant. Haunting is inherent to musical experience, and this quality enables music to support and intensify the spectral overlaps of past and present in Gothic, as became evident in my reading of Mamoulian's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* above. The phenomenology of musical meaning, moreover, shares the evanescence of phantoms. A sonic event in and of itself defies any referentiality; music, as organised sound, does not and cannot signify anything beyond its own musicality. Kramer argues that melody is 'practical necromancy' as 'its movement [is] never other than a continuous flowing away from any possible origin'.[20] In the process of the musical event there is a crossing-over from the absolute non-referentiality of sound per se to the personal and collective meanings inscribed in music. Music does not objectively mean anything—but it always-already means something to someone. Therefore haunting is part of the very construction of music: musical meaning is a conjuration.[21]

These aspects of musical experience can explain why the ghost of Bach haunts any organ concert, or any diabolical organist playing the Toccata and Fugue in horror film. But Bach's music also has its own internal hauntings. Listening to the

18 Botting, *Gothic*, pp. 1–6.

19 Lawrence Kramer, *Musical Meaning: Toward a Critical History* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), p. 259.

20 Kramer, *Musical Meaning*, p. 279.

21 In paraphrase of Derrida's analysis of haunting. Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International* (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 202.

aforementioned 'O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden', for instance, invites a plethora of reverberations. There is the echo of Hassler's original melody; there is Crueger's *Praxis Pietatis Melica*; there is the history of the text from Arnulf van Leuven to Paul Gerhardt; and there are our own emotional and scholarly experiences with this piece, all of which may inform the meanings we attribute to it. In my book on mystical love I illustrate the ways in which secular discourses of love echo in German baroque theology and in compositional idioms of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. From the viewpoint of Gothic analysis, my argument is that Petrarch is absently present in Bach, and moreover that the unease often surrounding the erotic overtones of some of Bach's works presents a musical form of the uncanny—the repression of erotic desire in sacred contexts may cause it to return and render the familiar site of devotion *unheimlich*.

***Musical border-crossing***

The performativity of musical experience also enhances the transgressions described in Gothic narratives. In literature, film and other media these border-crossings are often signalled by music. Music is considered able to vocalise or conjure up ghosts and exorcise vampires; it can draw listeners into its flow and take them across borders of reality or spirituality. Music is particularly associated with transcendence, the transgression that leads to the dissolution of the boundaries between the worldly and the divine, or the mundane and the supernatural. Ann Radcliffe, for instance, describes the transcendent qualities of musical experience in one of the first Gothic novels, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794):

> As [Emily] listened, the mid-night hymn of the monks rose softly from a chapel, that stood on one of the lower cliffs, an holy strain, that seems to ascend through the silence of the night to heaven, and her thoughts ascended with it.[22]

In Sheridan LeFanu's vampire novella *Carmilla* (1872), music has equally strong powers, as the demonic nature of the title character is contested by the divine agency of sacred music:

> Peasants walking two-and-two came behind, they were singing a funeral hymn. [Carmilla] said brusquely, 'Don't you perceive how discordant that is? [...]'. Her face underwent a change that alarmed and even terrified me for a moment. It darkened, and became horribly livid; her teeth and hands were clenched, and she frowned and compressed her lips […]. At length a low convulsive cry of suffering broke from her, and gradually the hysteria subsided. 'There! That comes of strangling people with hymns!'[23]

Reflecting on precisely such aspects of musical experience, another Gothic author, Edgar Allen Poe, notes that these transcendent qualities are inherent to musical

[22] Ann Radcliffe, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (London: Penguin, 2001), p. 48.

[23] Sheridan LeFanu, 'Carmilla', *In a Glass Darkly* (Gloucester: Alan Sutton Publishing, 1990), pp. 263–4.

experience, which offers listeners a glimpse of the 'supernatural ecstasies' we desire but 'are as yet in no condition to banquet upon'.[24]

All these extracts illustrate a recurrent theme in music history and criticism: immersion in music is often assessed as magical or transcendent. From the miraculous powers of Orpheus' hymns to Luther's endorsement of music as a sonic form of theology,[25] from Friedrich Nietzsche's extolling of Dionysian enchantment through music to Schopenhauer's conviction that 'music is an unconscious exercise in metaphysics',[26] music's force can take listeners anywhere. Music's powers, it is argued time and time again, are not to be contained by borders such as those between the worldly and the divine, the tangible and the supernatural, or even good and evil. For this reason music is supremely suitable for audiences' immersion in the liminal spaces and twilight zones explored in Gothic, as the passages from Radcliffe, LeFanu and Poe illustrate. However, while the music in these literary examples can only be described and imagined, transcendent music in Gothic film and TV, gaming and subculture can be heard directly. Dr Jekyll seems literally carried away, 'lost in music', when he is playing the organ, and the immersed cinema audience exceeds the limits of sanity and (in)humanity with him.

In a pivotal scene from Ulmer's *The Black Cat*, one of Karloff's helpers accompanies an occult ritual taking place in a dark basement by playing J. S. Bach on the organ. The effect of the music is similar to that in *Jekyll and Hyde*: the participants in the ritual as well as the cinema audience become immersed in a music-induced reality that is not restricted to the here and now. The setting of this scene is no coincidence, as this type of musically enhanced border-crossing is characteristic of various types of ritual. Rituals, from Catholic transubstantiation to the summoning of pagan deities, are performed in order to invoke a dissolution of boundaries such as those between worldly and divine, word and flesh, life and death. Rituals create an ultimate twilight zone in which the sacred and secular spill over into each other; as liturgy, music accompanies rituals and reinforces their working. Music functions as a gateway to other dimensions in culturally disparate ceremonies. Buddhist mantras, Gregorian chant, Satanist rites and Lutheran church music share the same metaphysical assessments of musical immersion—Poe's 'supernatural ecstasies' of listening to music. Liturgical music has the express purpose of inviting listeners to transcend the here and now, and enter an unknown—often metaphysical—then and there.

This excess of boundaries is at the heart of Gothic, and this is why music, whether described in literature, heard on the film or television screen, or physically felt at a club night, is so important to the genre. Music's capacity to stretch time and space, dissolve subjectivity, and explore the limits of imagination is used to enhance Gothic's distortions of reality, self, and the knowable. Through

[24] Edgar Allan Poe, 'Music', in David Galloway (ed.), *Selected Writings of Edgar Allan Poe* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1967), p. 433.

[25] Martin Luther, *Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (Weimar: Böhlau, [1929]), l, pp. 370 ff.

[26] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*. Thrift Editions (New York: Dover, 1995), pp. 4, 55–60, and 67–73; Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, 2 vols (Indian Hills, Colorado: The Falcon's Wing Press, 1958), i, p. 264.

what I analyse in *Gothic Music* as a *liturgical* use of music in Gothic literature, cinema or television, audiences are able to experience viscerally the border-crossings it describes. Whether or not listeners want to, they are dragged along in the musical movement from the mundane to the divine, the occult, or any other plane of reality.

What music is better suited than Bach's to induce such border-crossings? Bach is the most famous composer of sacred music, and his works convey a metaphysical dimension even to irreligious audiences. His compositions, built as they are on rhetorical principles, are designed to carry listeners along in their liturgical movement from the worldly to the divine. His cantatas and especially his passions are shaped as musical tragedies, and his careful contrasting of serene simplicity and baroque expression do not fail to immerse listeners. This explains why, in the examples mentioned here, Bach's music is consistently used to underline plot moments depicting transgression, especially where the boundaries between the worldly and the supernatural become blurred, where ghosts appear or are being evoked, where the sacred and the sinful collapse. Precisely because of the 'uncanny mixed bag' of allusions it evokes, Bach's music is supremely able to indicate, intensify and even produce Gothic transgression.

More importantly perhaps, many of Bach's works reflect Lutheran mysticism, hugely influential in current German baroque theology and devotional practice. Mysticism revolves around the desire to be united with God or Christ: this unification, *unio mystica*, temporarily removes the borders between the human and the divine. Mystical desire is transcendent and irrational, it describes the love for that constant absent presence of Christianity, Jesus, whose return is anticipated with anxious desire. It was expressed in the most sentimental of baroque imagery—often verging on the tasteless. Historically, Lutheran mysticism was a reaction to what has been called a 'crisis of religiosity' in Germany after the perhaps all-too-rigorous abolition of Catholic transcendence and sentimentality by Reformation theologians.[27] There are significant historical parallels between the rise of Lutheran mysticism in the seventeenth century and that of the Gothic a century later: both were a reaction to overt rationalism, representing the return of repressed irrationalism; both thematised border-crossings and the supernatural; both expressed themselves in excessive, sentimental language; and both were tremendously popular despite being frowned upon by higher authorities.[28] If only one word is changed, Botting's definition of Gothic's reaction to the Enlightenment describes precisely what Lutheran mysticism attempted to do:

> explain what the *Reformation* left unexplained, efforts to reconstruct the divine mysteries that reason had begun to dismantle, to recuperate pasts and histories that offered a permanence and unity in excess of the limits of rational [...] order.[29]

27 Martin Brecht, *Geschichte des Pietismus 1* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993), pp. 113–203.

28 Cf. Van Elferen, *Mystical Love*, ch 5.

29 Ibid.

Bach gave this 'reconstruction of divine mysteries' a soundtrack—and, agitating against 'stumbling Reason' (Aria 6 from cantata *Wo Gott der Herr nicht bei uns hält* BWV 178), created a profoundly immersive liturgy to mystical transcendence.

While the Lutheran background of Bach's music was self-evident to audiences in the past, modern listeners will recognise it more generally as church music. They might miss the Lutheran specificities of Bach's compositions, but his musical language is rich and convincing enough to induce an immersion deep enough to cause any listener to transcend the mundane and temporarily enter the dimension of the metaphysical. If Bach's music does not offer listeners 'a glimpse of the supernatural'—whether that supernatural be evangelical, mystical, generally Christian, or something darker as in *Inspector Morse*—no music does. And of course metaphysics itself, in whatever shape or form, has become the uncanny, returning repressed in an increasingly secularised world...[30]

## Gothic musicology

Finally, I would like to consider the possible implications of this essay for Bach scholarship. Apart from what seem to me very exciting new lines of research, 'the Gothic Bach' could offer an interesting opportunity for scholarly self-reflection. Gothic identifies ghosts, the hauntings in cultural historical situations. The Bach whom historical performance practice and musicology are so desperate to reconstruct is as much a ghost from an irretrievable past as are Dickens' Christmas ghosts; the ghost of Bach past haunts the nostalgic consciousness of those who long to reconstruct history. In such reconstruction, as Taruskin notes, we construct nothing but our own version of Bach, reflecting what we want him to reflect.[31] From Mendelssohn to Gardiner, from Spitta to Steiger and Wolff, Bach the last baroque composer, the harmonic genius, the fifth evangelist—more than anything, all these visions of Bach reflect the desires and anxieties of the beholder or the listener. In this sense, musicological rewritings of Bach bear an *uncanny* resemblance to Walpole's nostalgic rewriting of medieval Gothic architecture. Our musicological notion of the historic Bach is just as romantic, as distorted, as Gothic as the Bach who inspires horror film directors and the Bach who haunts Halloween.

Rewritten, distorted, haunting: Bach is a conjuration.

[30] Rudolf Otto's contemplation of the uncanny as an indicator, or even premonition, of the sacred acquires renewed interest in this context. See Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and its Relation to the Rational* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1923/1950), pp. 125–9.

[31] Taruskin, *Text and Act*, p. 320.