Andreas Werckmeister (1645-1706) was a provincial organist who spent his life in the Harz Mountain region of Germany, but he fancied himself a musical theorist and philosopher of the first order. Werckmeister wrote a number of treatises concerning music theory, organ playing, and the tuning of keyboard instruments. While Werckmeister’s treatises nominally address practical musical issues, what is most interesting about them has been neglected: his detailed philosophical commentaries on music and the “paradoxes” of tuning. Scholars have studied the influence of his mathematically “rational” keyboard temperament (tuning) systems on the musical practice of eminent Baroque musicians such as J.S. Bach. But the more important questions have been ignored: what were Werckmeister’s philosophical motivations for solving the “paradoxes” of tuning? And why was the temperament of keyboard instruments, in particular, significant to him? These questions have been neglected not only because Werckmeister is remembered as a lowly organist (rather than as a philosopher), but also because his treatises complicate the standard narrative that links eighteenth century music with scientific rationalism. Indeed, Werckmeister’s seemingly “rational” temperament systems have their philosophical basis in the Renaissance-era tradition which links music and number with magic. By analyzing the philosophical content of Werckmeister’s treatises, I intend to show how ordinary musicians like Werckmeister used “antiquated” music theory not only for practical purposes, but also as a tool for negotiating their marginal social position -- just as scientists conducted “rational” musical experiments to distinguish their work from alchemy practiced by magicians.

This project will be a unique scholarly contribution for three reasons: first, it will seriously consider the philosophical content of Werckmeister’s treatises, and contextualize this content within a broader debate about magic and rationalism; second, it will examine the professional tensions at stake in this debate; third, it will fill a gap in English language scholarship on
Werckmeister. Most scholarly literature on Werckmeister is in German, and most of his treatises are not translated into English. Existing scholarship, however, in both German and English neglect the issues that I intend to study.

During this semester I have been conducting primary source archival research on Werckmeister in the Drexel Collection at the New York Public Library. In particular, I have translated sections of Werckmeister’s *Musicalische-Paradoxal Discourse* (1707). In this text, he writes about God as the creator of all harmony, secret musical knowledge, numbers, true and false Christianity, and paradoxes of tuning. The connection between these topics is far from obvious, and so my project focuses on locating the eclectic philosophical content of Werckmeister’s treatise within a broader cultural and philosophical context. To that end, I have studied and translated the historical sources to which Werckmeister refers, as well as the texts of his contemporaries. For instance, I translated sections of Athanasius Kircher’s Latin *Musurgia Universalis* (1650), as well as Andreas Hirsch’s German translation of the *Mursurgia Universalis* (1662) to locate the source of Werckmeister’s idea that God created the universe according harmonious musical proportions. I also translated portions of organist Johann Heinrich Buttstedt’s treatise *Ut, mi, sol, re, fa, la, tota musica et harmonia aeterna* (1716) from German. This text provides insight into how magical, theological approaches to music were defended against critiques from theorists such as Johann Mattheson, who desired to rationalize music theory. Furthermore, I have read extensively about the history of science in the early-modern period. During the Scientific Revolution, music was considered a mathematical science, and was studied by all major scientists including Isaac Newton. Scientists, however, studied music experimentally in order to distance their work from the speculative philosophy of mere organists like Werckmeister. While my current research has begun to contextualize Werckmeister’s treatises
within a broader discourse about music and magic during the eighteenth century, there remain many texts and questions that I have not had the opportunity to study and investigate.

This summer I intend to extend my research into Werckmeister’s musical thinking by continuing my primary source work in the Drexel Collection. The Drexel Collection contains, in addition to a complete collection of Werckmeister’s treatises, primary sources of theorists contemporary to Werckmeister as well as historical sources that he himself read. It is critical for me to stay in New York City to conduct this research because this kind of collection is not available anywhere else in the United States. Having an opportunity for sustained archival research in the Drexel Collection will allow me to follow lines of inquiry I could not pursue this semester. In addition to translating more of Werckmeister’s treatises, I intend to study more of the magical and scientific sources he references. I will also examine more closely the critical reception of Werckmeister’s treatises by mid-eighteenth century theorists. By doing so, I will clarify and expand upon my idea that music played a central role in the contentious debate between the magical thinking and rationalism. I also intend to study the culture of organists and organs during the late-seventeenth century to understand why keyboard temperament was such a critical practical and philosophical issue for Werckmeister.

During the month of June, I will focus on translating Werckmeister’s treatises in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of his philosophical framework. In particular, I intend to translate Chapters 1-3 of the Musicalische Paradoxal Discourse as well as pages 26-35 of Werckmeister’s translation of composer Agostino Steffani’s treatise Sendschreiben (1700). I then plan on writing a short paper (5-10 pages) about these translations and their significance to my project questions. During the month of July, I will focus on studying and translating sections from scientific texts Werkemeister references such as Johannes Kepler’s Harmonices Mundi (1619) to
understand how Werckmeister appropriated scientific treatises into his magical thinking. I will also translate sections of texts such as Johann Mattheson’s *Das neu-eröffnete Orchestre* (1713) and Johann Gottfried Walther’s *Musicalisches Lexicon* (1732) to study the critical reception of Werckmeister’s treatises by theorists in the mid-eighteenth century. Again, I will write a short paper that summarizes and contextualizes my findings. During August, I will synthesize my translations, secondary-source research, and papers by writing an extended research paper that builds upon ideas from the twenty-five-page research paper I wrote for my project this semester.

I request the full $3,800 for funding. $1,883 of the funding will go toward my research stipend. $1,917 of the funding will go toward evening courses in German at the Deutsches Haus at NYU. Although some of the sources that I will translate are in Latin, the majority of my primary research materials are in German. Translating seventeenth-century German involves many distinct challenges, which slow down the translation process: first, these texts are written in Fraktur script instead of Latin script, which requires great care to decipher; second, these texts contain spelling irregularities and archaic word usages; third, these texts contain large amounts of Latin and Greek. I am not proposing to take these courses for academic credit; rather, continuing to improve my German will enable me to translate in a more nuanced, efficient, and accurate way. These classes will not be a distraction from my research, but will instead improve the quality of my project. I spent this past year taking classes at the Deutsches Haus, in addition to a full course load, and I found the instruction to be invaluable for my current project. Pursuing knowledge of German at a professional level will distinguish my research as an undergraduate student, and improve the competitiveness of my applications to PhD programs in musicology. I also request summer housing for sessions I and II so that I can conduct research in the Drexel Collection, take my German courses, and meet with my advisor to discuss the progress of my project.
Bibliography

I. Primary source material

a. Sources referenced by Werckmeister (NYPL Collection and Fordham Special Collection primary sources in bold)


vii. Maier, Michael. *Michaelis Majeri … Secretioris naturæ secretorum scrutinium chymicum…* (originally published in 1618 as *Atalanta*)

[New York Public Library, Lenox Collection, KB p.v.9.]


b. Werckmeister and his contemporaries: colleagues and critics (NYPL Drexel Collection primary sources in bold)


ii. Buttstedt, Ut, mi, sol, re fa, la toto musica et harmonia aeterna, Erffurt: O. F. Werther, 1716. [New York Public Library, Drexel Collection, Drexel 2729.]

iii. Mattheson, Johann. Das neu-eröffnete Orchestre... Hamburg, 1713. [New York Public Library, Drexel Collection, Drexel 2692).


II. Secondary source material


