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## The Isobematic Language in the Work Asas by Christopher Bochmann

Gonçalo André Dias Pescada <sup>a,b,++\*</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

Isobematic language, as a system based on a single unit of the same size (half-tone), has strong repercussions on fingering, registers, articulation and, consequently, on the sound produced by the various instruments. Writing or composing using isobematic language means organizing pitches (interval construction), rhythms, dynamics, articulations according to the sum of more or less “spaces of equal size”. The accordion, portable aerophone invented and patented in 1829 by Cyrill Damian in Austria, emerges in the 21st century as one of the most versatile instruments in the history of music [1] has unique characteristics to perform this kind of language: keyboard buttons (half-tones) disposition, symmetry, direct aptitude to transpose stuff, among others. The piece *Asas*, composed by Christopher Bochmann, it's a work written for accordion, soprano voice, saxophone, viola and cello based on this new language and a good example of the accordion integration in the panorama of contemporary music and in the performative relationship with other instruments. The purpose of this article is to analyze the new work regarding some idiosyncrasies of the isobematic language and the role of the accordion among the other classical instruments.

*Keywords:* *Asas; Christopher bochmann; accordion; analysis; contemporary music.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Bochmann (2013, p. 11) points that the concept of isobematic music results from a desire to bring the structure of music closer to the ear and the listener, without giving up the musical language, but theorizing it in its own and positive terms instead of resorting to ways to avoid tonalism [2].

The work *Asas*<sup>1</sup> was composed by Christopher Bochmann on January 9, 2020, in Lisbon. Originally written for voice (soprano), soprano saxophone, accordion,

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<sup>a</sup> Évora University, Portugal.

<sup>b</sup> Centro de Estudos de Sociologia e Estética, Portugal.

<sup>++</sup> Assistant Professor and Researcher (CESEM);

<sup>\*</sup>Corresponding author: E-mail: gpescada@uevora.pt;

viola and cello, the work was commissioned by the contemporary music group Síntese (Guarda). With regard to the general structure, *Asas* is made up of 3 parts. Instead of giving traditional names for the movements as *Moderato*, *Andante*, *Allegro*, *Presto*, among others, the composer decided to call each movement as Part I, Part II and Part III. The score is written along 34 pages with a duration of approximately 9'. In Table 1, information about the structure appears.

*Cortot states that the musician must “understand the context of the work, but also analyze the different planes, lines and proportions of the musical construction as if it were an architectural construction” [3].*

Jacomucci reinforces that *the intense collaboration with composers led to a cultural elevation of the unique instrument*, laying the foundations for a literature that both at a concert and pedagogical level and creating a perspective that did not exist before [4].

According to Rink a positive emotional response to musical content will be the key to greater *intrinsic musical motivation* [5].

Schönberg compares art as an *imitation of nature* and warns of the importance of sensations that lead to new movements in connection with other musicians [6].

Lips points out articulation and phrasing as *determining factors for safe and accurate interpretation* [7].

In terms of isobematic language, Bochmann (2019) adds also that it is the interval that interests us more than the notes themselves. The ear pays more attention to the relationship between notes than to the individual notes themselves. Music is a world of relativities, yet these notes have to be fixed in space for their relativities to be heard [8].

## **2. FIRST MOVEMENT - PART I**

Part I appears over 58 bars, in an *Andante tempo* assigned to the instruments soprano voice, soprano saxophone and accordion. The text that appears associated with the voice is the following: “*asas, para que quero asas se em mim mora a alma de um sonhador*” [trad.: wings, why do I want wings if the soul of a dreamer lives in me].

The first movement of *Asas* begins with the soprano voice and the soprano saxophone (bar 1) in a dynamic *mp* and *Andante* tempo. The initial notes (A, C) constitute the beginning of the entry of the soprano voice and also of the saxophone in an undulating movement that always returns to the starting point, the C5 note.

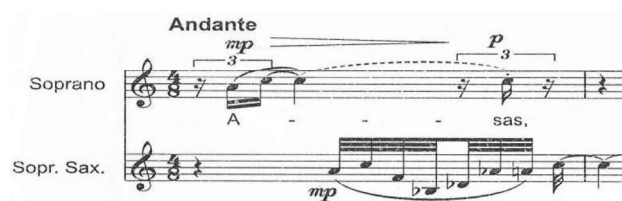
This first intervention extends to bar 5, when the accordion enters. The chord played by the accordion appears in bellow shake, in a vertical construction characteristic of Christopher Bochmann's writing with the following interval

relationship (minor seventh in the bass, major third, perfect 5th, minor second, minor third). In isobematic language, interval 11, 4, 7, 1, 3.

The chord (Eb, D, F#, C#, D, F) emerges in bellow shake in a total of 11 movements, decelerating, allowing the transition to the next intervention of the soprano saxophone in bar 6. From bar 6 onwards, the saxophone focuses on the E note (the third minor above the C# note) also assuming the main melodic conduction reinforced by accordion in a bellow shake movement (4 movements) in bar 7 and by the entry of the soprano voice in bar 8.

**Table 1. Structure of the work Asas**

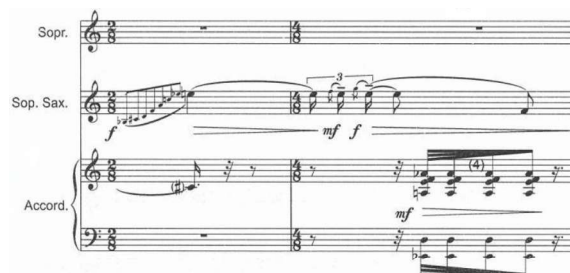
	Movement	n. bars / pages
<b>First movement / Part I</b>	Andante	58 bars / 10 pages
<b>Second movement / Part II</b>	L'istesso tempo	18 bars / 5 pages
<b>Third movement / Part III</b>	L'istesso tempo	67 bars / 19 pages



**Fig. 1. Asas - Beginning of Andante section**



**Fig. 2. Asas - Bellow shake movement**



**Fig. 3. Asas - Interaction between saxophone and accordion**

From bar 8 onwards, the soprano voice once again takes the lead, developing the material up to the G note that occurs at the canonical entry of bar 9 reinforced by the bellow shake movements on the accordion (7 moves) also decelerating. In bar 9, the motif that precedes the G note on the saxophone will be inverted in the soprano voice (Eb, Ab, F, E).

It should be noted that the musical text attributed to the accordion has a completely idiomatic writing, in the sense that the progression of the chords over the same bass (Eb, D) happens in a gradual way that allows the same fingering on the keyboard. It should also be noted that this entire first part / tempo is performed only by the soprano voice, soprano saxophone and accordion.

In bar 10, the accordion begins the entry complemented by the saxophone and in bar 11 the saxophone extends its speech again to the B note (the third major above the G note). This section ends at bar 12 with a minor seventh interval performed in voice. So far, the text has been the word "Asas". Once the thematic exposition is over, bar 13 moves on to the development, the text mentions "para que quero asas" [trad.: why do I want wings].



**Fig. 4. Asas - Interaction between voice, saxophone and accordion**



**Fig. 5. Asas - Rhythmic division of the text in the soprano voice**

In bar 13, the saxophone and the accordion enter simultaneously, opening space for the entry of the voice (note C#) in a dynamic *mf* and in a rhythmic and melodic discourse that will extend until the note F, originating a motif that will be presented in a canonic texture between the three instruments.

It should be noted that the accordion sometimes plays the role of two or more different instruments. In bar 16, the soprano voice establishes a major third (A - C#) while the accordion performs a rotation of schematic chords.

In turn, the alto saxophone performs an inverted movement (bar 17) that originates the canonical entry of the accordion (G#, B, C, G) in bar 18.

From bar 19 onwards, an open dialogue emerges between a soprano voice, an alto saxophone and an accordion in a speech that deepens but which highlights all of Christopher Bochmann's compositional mastery. The text reflects the word "Asas". This small section develops up to bar 24. In bar 25, a new frame appears up to bar 30 and this time the text refers to "se em mim mora a alma" [trad.: if my soul lives in me].



**Fig. 6. Asas - Block chord progression on the accordion**



**Fig. 7. Asas - Canonical entry on the accordion**



Fig. 8. Asas - Rhythmic division of the text in the soprano voice

At this moment, the accordion performs vertical textures at the beginning (Bellow shake movements in *desacelerando*), interacting contrapuntically from the second half on bar 27.

In bar 28, the dialogue between the voices intensifies, giving rise to a fictitious but proportional canonical relationship between the three instruments, mainly through the motifs (Ab, F, E, Eb) in the voice, (F, E, B) in the saxophone and (G#, E, F#) on the accordion. The bass line, in the accordion, performs an half-tones progression in a descending sense (F#, F, E) which is preceded by an interval inflection of perfect fifth (E, B) juxtaposing this progression with an ascent by minor thirds (A, C, Eb).

Also at the end of bar 29 / beginning of 30 interesting relationships arise, eg. (B, Bb, F, D) especially the rising fifth and descending third (soprano voice), (E, A, F) rising eleventh, falling third on saxophone and (G, F#, B) on accordion, especially the minor second and diminished fourth.

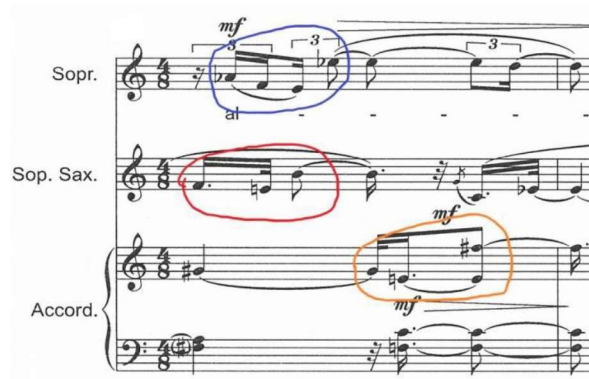
In the section between bars 31 to 39, it seems to resume development through canonical relationships between the voices, e.g. G, Eb, D in accordion and saxophone, G, D in soprano voice.

From bar 40 to the end of bar 46, the saxophone and the accordion establish a fruitful and accessible dialogue. In this period, the voice appears with a small development starting at bar 42 and ending at bar 45.

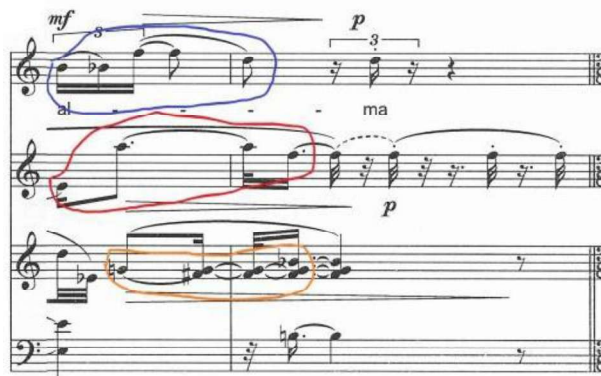
From bar 47 onwards, the voice develops and progresses in the text, the saxophone establishes a dialogue with motifs that appear in moments of rest in the voice. The accordion takes on a clearly assumed vertical texture for the vertical filling and basic sustain of the voice and saxophone. This relationship will remain until the end of *Part I*.



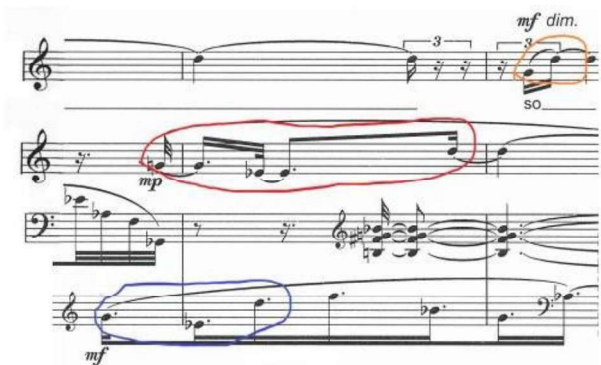
Fig. 9. Asas - Bellow shake movements on *decelerating*



**Fig. 10. Asas - Dialogue between the voices**



**Fig. 11. Asas - Complementary relationship**



**Fig. 12. Asas - Augmentation / decrease canonical relations**



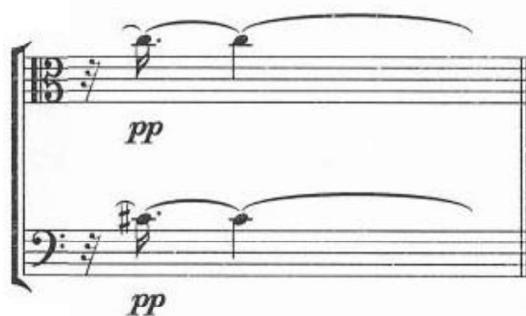
**Fig. 13. Asas - Dialogue between soprano voice and saxophone**

At the end of the first part (bar 58) the viola and cello with the notes C and C# respectively (interval 1 – minor 2nd) fade in (pp) establishing the transition to *part II* of the work.

The voice ends with the syllable “so”, leaving the word “sonhador” [trad.: dreamer] open. The saxophone plays a small motif (Ab, A, C, B), piano dynamics and legato in ascending motion (minor second, minor third and major seventh). In turn, the accordion ends this first part in a suspended chord consisting of minor seconds at the ends, minor third, perfect fifth and minor seventh in the center.

Bennett addresses the importance of recognizing musical styles and interpreting according to what was pre-established by the composer [9].

Azevedo underlines a sentence by Christopher Bochmann: “I think what is most moving is the recognition of something really sincere” [10].



**Fig. 14. Asas - End of *Part I* section - passing notes to *Part II* section**

For Bochmann the harmonic language of Tonalism is defined in specific patterns that have nothing to do with serialism or twelve-tone music [11]. However, Bochmann assumes that rhythm plays a fundamental role in composition, especially in contemporary music [12].



### 3. PART II

The *Part II* section is developed over 18 bars in *L'istesso tempo* for the instruments only (saxophone, accordion, viola and cello). The voice will have its moment only in the *Part III* section.

In the first bar, 1/8, the viola and the cello play the notes started at the end of Part I (last bar) with the intention of continuing the discourse and not exactly stopping between movements.

From bar 2 to bar 5, the viola and cello develop their text in a parallel language at vertical distance of minor second (bar 2), minor sixth (bar 3), diminished fourth (bar 3), major twelfth (bar 4). The flow of movements is descending in bar 2, ascending in bar 3, and descending in bar 4.

From bar 5 onwards, the entry of voices start to be canonic, at a distance of one bar. The saxophone will enter bar 9 and intensify, in a relation of complementarity / extension of the lines, this construction of canonic moments.

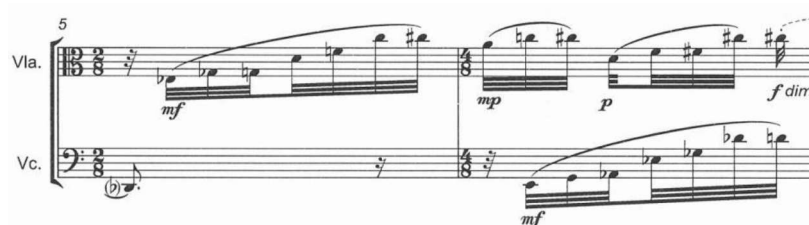
In bar 11, the accordion begins a parallel discourse between the keyboards in permanent dialogue with the saxophone while the strings (viola and cello) develop a kind of parallel texture.



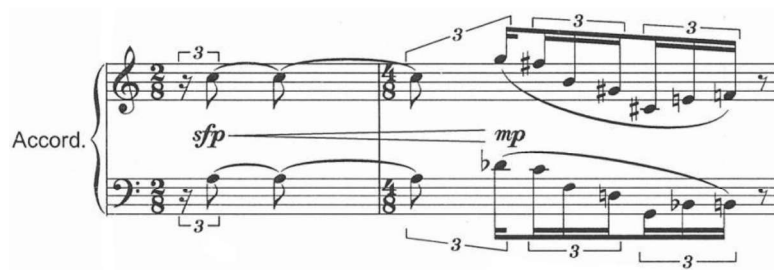
Fig. 15. *Asas* - Beginning of *Part II*



Fig. 16. *Asas* - Parallelism between viola and cello



**Fig. 17. Asas - Canonic moment**



**Fig. 18. Asas - Parallel speech**

The confrontation between accordion and saxophone appears by overlap in bar 12 and in question-answer in bar 13.

In bar 14, the accordion enters with a movement in triplets and the saxophone responds with the same motivic design but in a contraction process (32th notes). At the end of bar 16, we witness the imitation entry between the accordion and the saxophone.

In bar 17, the rhythmic game (4 by 3) is performed only by the accordion (two keyboards) with interaction between the saxophone and the strings from bar 18 onwards.

At this moment, the relation between the voices intensifies in a kind of canonic (contrapuntal style) in 5 voices that will establish the transition to Part III.

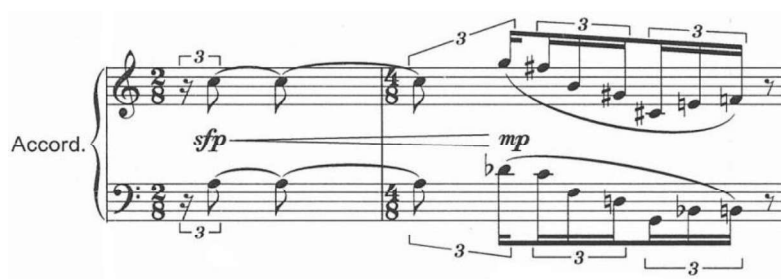
For Draugsvoll, G. & Højsgaard, E. the correct execution of the instrumental techniques used provides greater clarity in musical interpretation [13].

Ellegaard, M. refers to the usefulness of the converter system in the construction of separate and independent voices that allow the use of the accordion in modern chamber music groups [14].

In turn, Llanos, R. & Alberdi, I. introduce new interpretation and writing techniques that constitute an added value in the musical interpretation of works for accordion [15].

#### 4. PART III

*Part III* is the major part of the work *Asas* by Christopher Bochmann, it is developed in 67 bars in *L' istesso tempo* with the return of the voice with the following text: "alma de um sonhador para que quero asas" [trad.: soul of a dreamer for which I want wings]. In section *part III*, the accordion seems to assume a clear function of ostinato although with intertwined and fast motifs.



**Fig. 19. Asas - Parallel moment by augmentation**

**Fig. 20. Asas - Imitation moment by contraction**

In turn, the voice, the saxophone and the strings (viola and cello) sing the notes (C, Ab, A, E) in a parallel design in a single voice although transposed between the different voices.



**Fig. 21. Asas - Intensification of speech**



**Fig. 22. Asas - Beginning of *Part III* - Accordion**

From bar 3 onwards, the saxophone presents the motif out of phase with the other voices in a sort of deconstruction of the previously exposed material. In bar 5, the canonic entry is evident.

From bar 6 to bar 12, the accordion and strings (viola and cello) play an parallel role, while the saxophone interacts with the voice.

In the accordion, the rhythmic base changes slightly in bars 10, 11 and 12. In bar 13, the saxophone appears as a solo instrument in *legato articulation*, *cantabile* and *mp* dynamics on a vertical texture with two overlapping perfect fifths (Bb, F / A, E) performed by viola and cello.

Next, the accordion enters on bar 19, articulating its speech through a half-tones motif on the right- hand keyboard with repeating patterns that go down the range while the left-hand keyboard repeats a different motif (Eb, D, B, Bb, G, G#, A).



Fig. 23. Asas - Part III - Theme and homorhythmic writing



Fig. 24. Asas - Part III - Saxophone Phrasing

In bar 20, the soprano voice resumes its entry, in the syllable “so”, establishing a dialogue with the saxophone (bar 21). Interval 3 (note Eb on the saxophone) will determine the ascending movement of the voice towards Eb (unison) which will be finished by the descending interval 11 (E) on the saxophone.

In bar 24, voice, viola and cello come together. The voice develops the melody while the strings establish a parallel movement.

From bar 26 onwards, we return to the canonic moment, although the entrance of the voice presents an increased rhythm in relation to the saxophone and the strings have a reduced rhythm (32th note) - bar 28. This section will go up to bar 31.

From bar 32 onwards, the viola presents its moment as a soloist supported by the cello with notes with bow and *pizzicatos*.

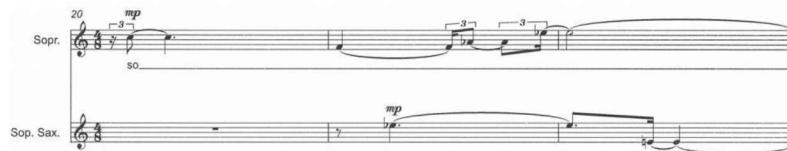
In bar 40, the voice appears in a *quasi parlato* register in a dynamic *pp* in *staccato articulation* referring to the text “para que quero” [trad.: what I want]. This moment (bar 40) will serve as a transition to the moment dedicated to the cello, in *cantabile* until bar 48.

From bar 49 onwards, we enter the initial phrase *Part I*, taken over by the soprano voice. The accordion enters the upturn for bar 49 with half-tones motif similar to the one performed above overlapped by movements in triplets. The material performed on the accordion serves as a basis for the canonic voice

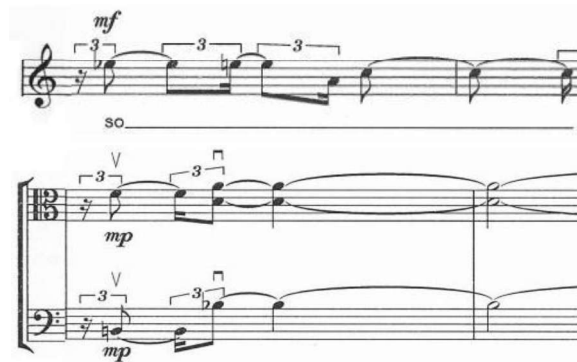
entries, followed by the saxophone in increased rhythm (bar 50), viola (bar 51) and cello (bar 52) in reduced rhythm (eighth notes).



**Fig. 25. Asas - Part III - Schematic speech on accordion**



**Fig. 26. Asas - Part III - Contrapuntal relationship between soprano voice and saxophone**



**Fig. 27. Asas - Part III - Vertical relationship between voice, viola and cello**

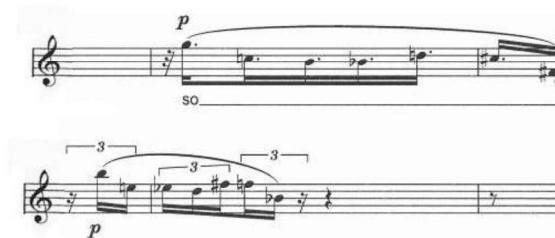




Fig. 28. Asas - Part III – Canonic entries by augmentation / diminution

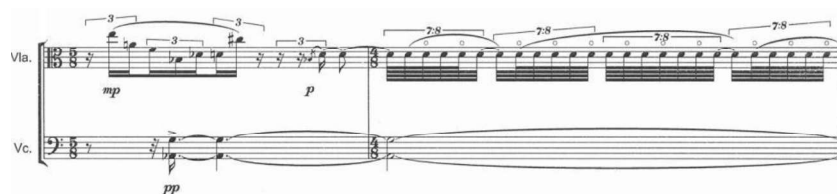


Fig. 29. Asas - Part III - Viola soloist moment

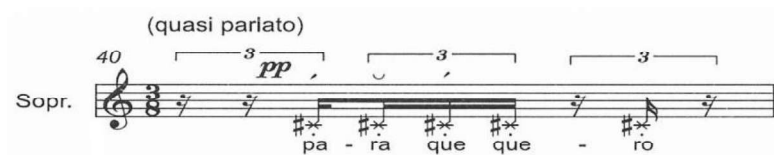


Fig. 30. Asas - Part III - Quasi parlato moment - Soprano voice



Fig. 31. Asas - Part III - Excerpt from solo cello part

From bar 54 onwards, the texture of the accordion changes (cluster on the right-hand keyboard), the voice focuses on the word “asas” [trad.: wings] (bar 55), the saxophone, viola and cello establish a final canonic relationship at the end of the bar 55 and 56, stabilizing the musical discourse with the word “asas” (voice entry) in bar 59. The accordion ends its speech in bar 60.

From bar 61, a small section appears marked by the parallel discourse between the saxophone, viola and cello in a dynamic *p*. String instruments play from this time on with *sordina*.

48

Sopr.

Sop. Sax.

Accord.

*mp*

*p*

*pp*

**Fig. 32. Asas - Part III - Initial motif (voice)**

Accord.

*fp*

**Fig. 33. Asas - Part III - Cluster on the accordion**

*f*

*f*

*dim.*

a,

a,

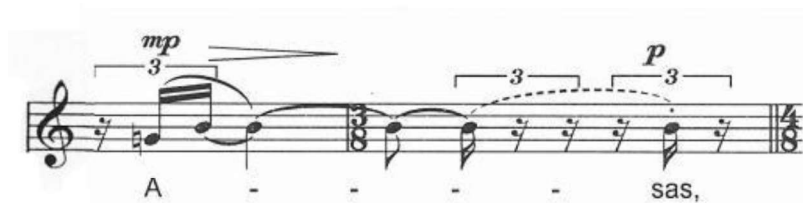
**Fig. 34. Asas - Part III - Melisma over the syllable "a" - Soprano voice**

*p*

*mf*

*mf*





**Fig. 35. Asas - Part III - Imitation moment between saxophone, viola and cello**

**Fig. 36. Asas - Part III - Voice entry. bar 59**

**Fig. 37. Asas - Part III - Parallel speech**

The soprano voice will appear in bar 62 with a slightly different rhythm but with the same interval relationship (minor 3rd, minor 2nd).

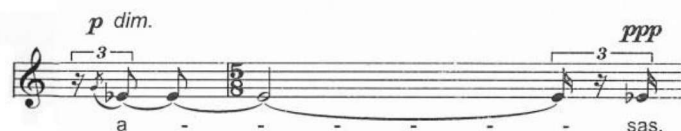
The entry of the saxophone (Eb, D, B, E) reinforced by the strings constitute the motto for the entrance of the voice (bar 62) that emphasizes the word "Asas". The final vertical construction (saxophone, viola and cello) results in a chord consisting of a major seventh and a perfect fifth (Db, C, G).



**Fig. 38. Asas - Part III - Voice entry**



**Fig. 39. Asas - Part III - Parallelism - saxophone, viola and cello**



**Fig. 40. Asas - Part III - Final - Voice entry**

The work ends on an Eb (soprano voice) with the second syllable of the word "Asas".

## 5. CONCLUSION

When analyzing the three parts of the work *Asas*, we can see the existing sound, harmonic and melodic beauty, but also the treatment of instrumental writing (sound layers and independent lines) that Christopher Bochmann imprints in his act of composing. '

The relationship of the soprano voice with the word, the relationship of the instruments that sometimes appear as a complement, sometimes in assumed directions of entries or musical transition, are essential characteristics that distinguish a language of musical discourse in search of a true intention to express feelings and emotions through music and art in general.

Rink encourages rigorous and disciplined study in individual parts so that group work is successful [16].

We can undoubtedly conclude that the work *Asas* catapults the instrument (accordion) to unique levels of musical interpretation and relationship with other instruments, raising prestige and the possibility of finding new stages.

Indeed, with the right registers combination, the perfect pitch and correct bellows balance it's possible to create singular sonorities in the accordion that allows to play any kind of music with temperanment, charisma, expressivity and ressonance even in the chamber music features.

The balance between the sonority, the articulation, dynamics, different textures, phrases, counterpoint, poliphony, among others, transports the musician to another field of comprehension spirituality and emotions.

## COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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**Biography of author(s)**



**Gonçalo André Dias Pescada**

Évora University, Portugal and Centro de Estudos de Sociologia e Estética, Portugal.

**Research and Academic Experience:** He attached with Instrumental and Chamber Music Units, Musical Didactics, Pratical Performance Seminar. He threw lecturer in conferences in Greece, Portugal, Japan and Romenia.

**Research Area:** His area of research includes Music and Musicology.

**Number of Published Papers:** He has published 5 research articles.

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