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**MUSICA E MATEMATICA**

**ESPERIENZE DIDATTICHE INTERDISCIPLINARI**

## bach: A Procedural Video Game Featuring Music Visualization for an Interdisciplinary Computer Based Approach to the Mathemusical Education

Giovanni Albini

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### ABSTRACT

*bach*, a side-scroller video game developed by the author aiming to strengthen the interdisciplinary teaching of musical and mathematical knowledge, is introduced. Its gaming experience and the implications of its procedural level generation in the context of music visualization are then discussed in terms of their potential educational effectiveness with reference to experimentation results of a case study.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Game-based learning environments provide a powerful resource for teaching and learning and have given rise in the last three decades to a specific and established area of research. It has been shown that "video games have the capacity to engage children in learning experiences", [1], and that they "not only teach content [...] but they may also teach us to learn, accelerating cognitive development", [2]. "Some evidence suggests that important skills may be built or reinforced by video games", [1], promoting "problem-solving, goal-oriented behavior, engagement and motivation", [3], and "research has shown how targeted games (i.e., games focused around particular concepts) might be used to create conceptual change", [4] But, although that should be all the more true in music learning, where the recreational element itself is foundational and underlined in many languages by musical words - *play*, *spielen*, *jouer*, etc. - it is well known that the recreational element is often overlooked in the teaching of music theory, [5], and that the potential of video games as tools to support and enrich formal music education have been mostly neglected, [6].

In this connection, the aim of this paper is to present *bach*, a video game designed by the author<sup>1</sup> to support interdisciplinary teaching of some fundamentals of counterpoint and Cartesian geometry. In fact, in [7] the author proposed an activity that was tested in 2007 for the second and third years of the junior secondary school in which

mathematics assisted music learning and conversely music theory supported learning mathematics, through a graphical visualization of Bach's works in the Cartesian plane. More specifically, it was targeted to "reinforce the [student's] ability to identify and analyze the perceptual properties of the musical sound through their abstraction and formal representation, [...] as well as to develop the mathematical skills in discerning invariant properties through the study of music and counterpoint"<sup>2</sup> [7]. *bach* has thus been designed with the goal to aid and strengthen such activity.

### 2. THE GAMEPLAY

The setting and the core of the gameplay of *bach* are briefly explained in its short tutorial: "*bach* [...] is a little bird who loves the music of J.S. Bach. In his dreams he flies over huge sounding cities born from the music of the German Maestro. Each note is a building: tall if the pitch is high and large if the note is long. He has to fly as close as possible to the skyline to truly enjoy the music he loves and to keep his dream afloat". MIDI files storing some of the keyboard music by Bach<sup>3</sup> are visualized as city skylines. *bach* moves horizontally at a constant speed (the tempo of the score) and while he flies over a building the associated note is played. Therefore, levels can be intended as a sort of city-like piano roll. Tapping and holding the screen makes *bach* ascend, otherwise he slowly loses altitude. A life-bar is given at the bottom of the screen: flying far from buildings, ascending and colliding consumes it, while flying close to the skyline replenishes it. If the life-bar runs out the player loses. The goal is to reach the end of the level (hence ending the listening of the score).

### 3. A CASE STUDY

To preliminarily test the effectiveness of *bach*, a study took place in two classes of the third year of a junior secondary school, 3A and 3B.<sup>4</sup> The activity described in [7] was condensed in two hours and carried out in the two classes independently. For pupils of class 3A the activity started introducing *bach* and always referring to it while introducing

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<sup>3</sup> The activity took place on September, 21<sup>st</sup> 2010 in the classes 3A (25 pupils) and 3B (24 pupils) of the Scuola Secondaria di Primo Grado "Paaviloo Kalkoni" in Udine. Professors Luigina Rastbach, Dorothea Di Vano and Mariacristina Squadrino assisted the author in carrying it out.

<sup>4</sup> *bach* has been developed in Unity game engine with C# language and built for Android, iOS, MacOS and Windows. It has been selected to be presented publicly for the first time at the third *Bioscience of Arts Contemporary in Salerno, Video Games and New Technologies of Art and Media* section, October, 6<sup>th</sup> - November, 18<sup>th</sup> 2010.

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## Musica e Matematica: una proposta didattica

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### 1. Introduzione

La mia attività di compositore e i miei studi universitari paralleli in matematica mi hanno condotto a prestare una particolare attenzione ai legami tra le due discipline. Un'attenzione innanzitutto di tipo teorico, attraverso la ricerca nell'ambito della teoria musicale studiata da un punto di vista matematico come illustrato nelle mie tesi di laurea triennale e specialistica (nonché in una serie di seminari tenuti per accademie e università), e un'attenzione di tipo pratico, nella definizione del mio stile, applicando alcuni risultati delle mie ricerche matematiche sulla teoria musicale alla composizione. I forti legami che andavo mano a mano scoprendo mi hanno anche indotto ad esperienze di proposte interdisciplinari nella scuola secondaria: questa proposta didattica nasce proprio a partire da un ciclo di cinque incontri di due ore ciascuno dal titolo "Matematica e Musica" che ho tenuto tra febbraio e marzo 2007 in una seconda classe della scuola media statale "G. Plana" di Voghera. Gli insegnanti coinvolti nel progetto sono stati la Prof.ssa Flavia Cantarella (per l'educazione musicale) e la Prof.ssa Laura Tiengo (per le scienze matematiche, chimiche, fisiche e naturali). Il modello di intervento didattico che mi accingo a descrivere nasce quindi proprio, attraverso opportuni aggiustamenti, da tale esperienza.

Lo scopo della presente proposta didattica è quello di rafforzare alcune competenze matematiche in possesso degli studenti mediante una loro applicazione per la rappresentazione di strutture musicali, e viceversa fissare e approfondire specifiche competenze musicali degli studenti mediante l'ausilio di strumenti matematici. La musica, difatti, si configura come l'applicazione di regole, di codici, processi, automatismi, e sistemi che lasciano trasparire le strutture su cui si fonda, e che evidentemente suggeriscono un legame con la matematica. Come già ben sottolineato in [Clavarino, Somaglia 2001] guardare un'opera d'arte, e quindi in linea più generale anche la teoria musicale, da un punto di vista matematico porta proprio a «mostrare la sottostante teoria dell'arte, a

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G. Albini: *bach: A Procedural Video Game Featuring Music Visualization for an Interdisciplinary Computer Based Approach to the Mathemusal Education*. In: Federico Fontana and Andrea Gulli (eds.), *Machine Sounds, Sound Machines*. Atti del XXII CIM – Colloquio di Informatica Musicale, DADI – Dip. Arti e Design Industriale. Università IUAV di Venezia, 2019, pp. 187-188.

**Febbraio/Marzo 2007**  
 Incontri alla scuola media  
 "G. Plana" di Voghera

**Gennaio 2010**

**Pubblicazione** →

**Primavera 2017**

**Corso di aggiornamento**  
 "F. Casorati" di Pavia

**Estate 2018**

**Programmazione di *bach***

**Ottobre 2018**

**Premi per *bach***

**Settembre 2018**

**Incontri alla scuola media**  
 "P. Valussi" di Udine

**Novembre 2018**

**Pubblicazione** ←

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G. Albini: *Musica e Matematica: una Proposta Didattica*. In: *L'insegnamento della matematica e delle scienze integrate*, Vol. 33A N.1, gennaio 2010. pp. 65-83.

# **Musica e Matematica: una proposta didattica**

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## **Musica e Matematica: una proposta didattica**

Prerequisiti richiesti che con l'esperienza interdisciplinare ci si propone di rafforzare (in riferimento al D.M. 9/2/1979)

- per la **musica**:

1. la capacità di osservare e analizzare il suono nei suoi vari parametri (altezza, intensità, timbro, durata);
2. la comprensione della corrispondenza suono-segno e le capacità per un uso consapevole della notazione musicale di tipo tradizionale;
3. una conoscenza elementare delle tecniche contrappuntistiche.

- per la **matematica**:

1. la capacità di riconoscere proprietà varianti ed invarianti, analogie e differenze;
2. le competenze nell'uso del piano cartesiano per esprimere e rappresentare leggi e relazioni;
3. la conoscenza delle trasformazioni geometriche piane, ed eventualmente la loro rappresentazione analitica in particolari.

**I QUATTRO CARATTERI  
DISTINTIVI DEL SUONO  
(IN MUSICA)**

**ALTEZZA**

**DURATA**

**INTENSITÀ**

**TIMBRO**

**ALTEZZA**

**DURATA**

**INTENSITÀ**

**TIMBRO**



rappresentazione quantitativa per  
mezzo di una relazione d'ordine

1 semitono

... Do<sub>3</sub> Do<sub>3</sub>♯ Re<sub>3</sub> Re<sub>3</sub>♯ Mi<sub>3</sub> Fa<sub>3</sub> Fa<sub>3</sub>♯ Sol<sub>3</sub> Sol<sub>3</sub>♯ La<sub>3</sub> La<sub>3</sub>♯ Si<sub>3</sub> Do<sub>4</sub> ...

A musical staff in treble clef showing the chromatic scale from middle C (Do<sub>3</sub>) to the next C (Do<sub>4</sub>). The notes are: Do<sub>3</sub>, Do<sub>3</sub>♯, Re<sub>3</sub>, Re<sub>3</sub>♯, Mi<sub>3</sub>, Fa<sub>3</sub>, Fa<sub>3</sub>♯, Sol<sub>3</sub>, Sol<sub>3</sub>♯, La<sub>3</sub>, La<sub>3</sub>♯, Si<sub>3</sub>, Do<sub>4</sub>. A bracket above the first two notes is labeled "1 semitono".

1/16

... 1/16 1/8 3/16 1/4 5/16 3/8 7/16 2/4 ...

A musical staff showing rhythmic values: 1/16, 1/8, 3/16, 1/4, 5/16, 3/8, 7/16, 2/4. Each value is represented by a note stem with a flag. A bracket above the first two values is labeled "1/16".

*pppp* *ppp* *pp* *p* *mp* *mf* *f* *ff* *fff* *fff*

A musical staff showing dynamic markings: *pppp*, *ppp*, *pp*, *p*, *mp*, *mf*, *f*, *ff*, *fff*, *fff*. Vertical dashed lines connect these markings to the rhythmic values in the block above.

1 semitono    1 tono (2 semitoni)

Mi   Fa   Sol   La

1 semitono

... Do<sub>3</sub>   Do<sub>3</sub><sup>♯</sup>   Re<sub>3</sub>   Re<sub>3</sub><sup>♯</sup>   Mi<sub>3</sub>   Fa<sub>3</sub>   Fa<sub>3</sub><sup>♯</sup>   Sol<sub>3</sub>   Sol<sub>3</sub><sup>♯</sup>   La<sub>3</sub>   La<sub>3</sub><sup>♯</sup>   Si<sub>3</sub>   Do<sub>4</sub> ...

1/16

... 1/16   1/8   3/16   1/4   5/16   3/8   7/16   2/4 ...

*pppp*   *ppp*   *pp*   *p*   *mp*   *mf*   *f*   *ff*   *fff*   *fff*

1 semitono      1 tono (2 semitoni)

Mi   Fa   Sol   La

1 semitono

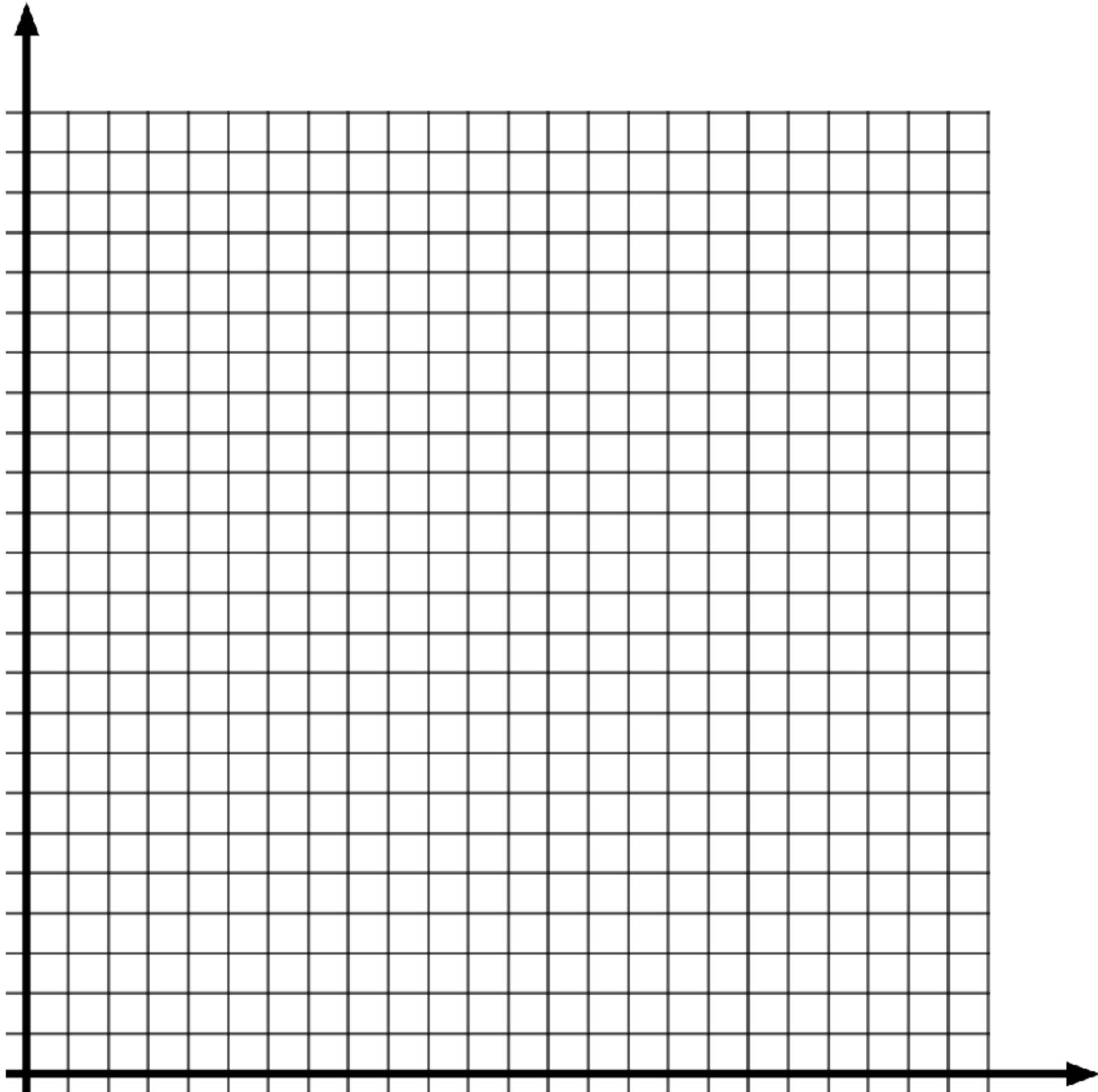
... Do<sub>3</sub>   Do<sub>3</sub>#   Re<sub>3</sub>   Re<sub>3</sub>#   Mi<sub>3</sub>   Fa<sub>3</sub>   Fa<sub>3</sub>#   Sol<sub>3</sub>   Sol<sub>3</sub>#   La<sub>3</sub>   La<sub>3</sub>#   Si<sub>3</sub>   Do<sub>4</sub> ...

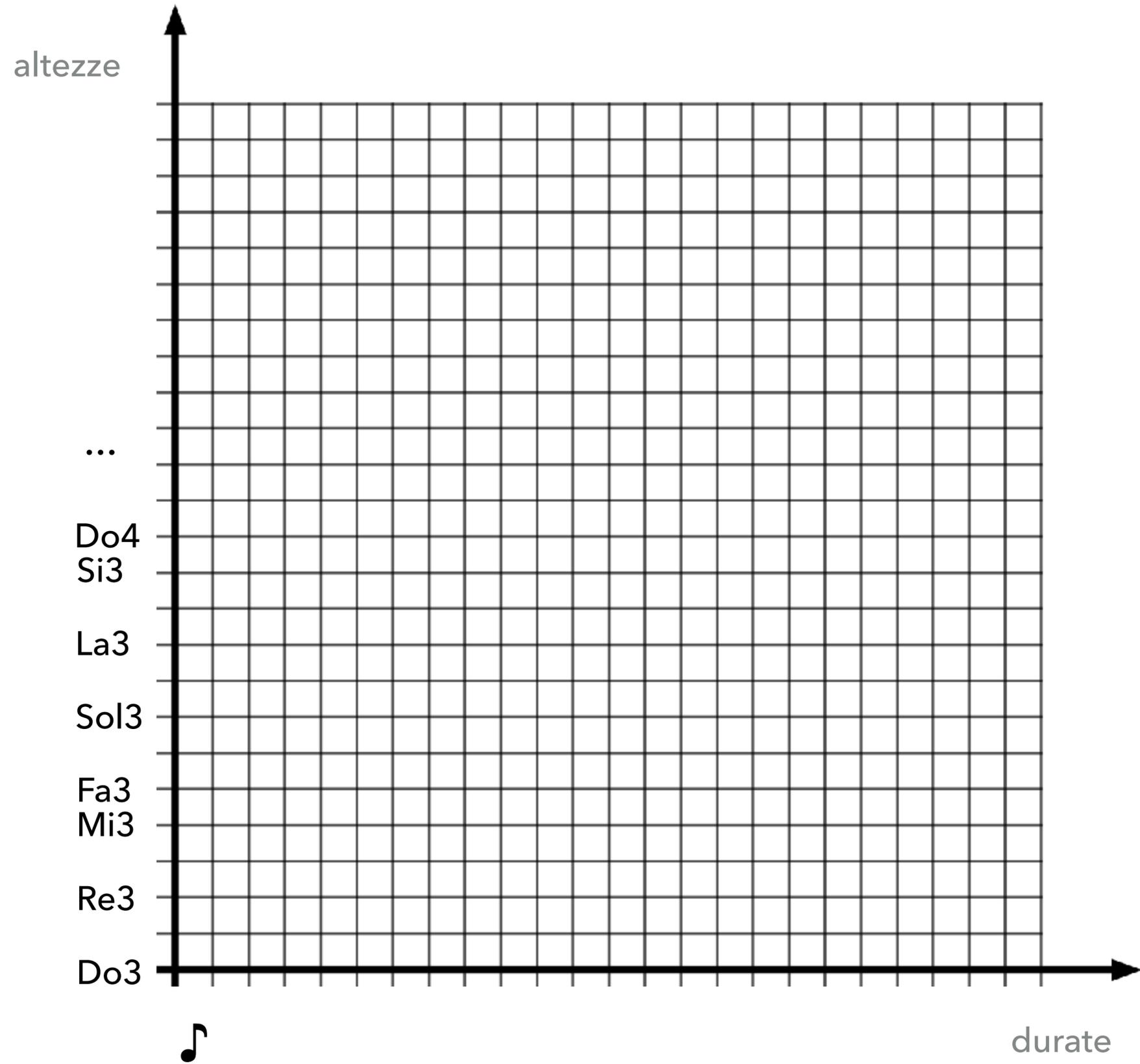
1/16

... 1/16   1/8   3/16   1/4   5/16   3/8   7/16   2/4 ...

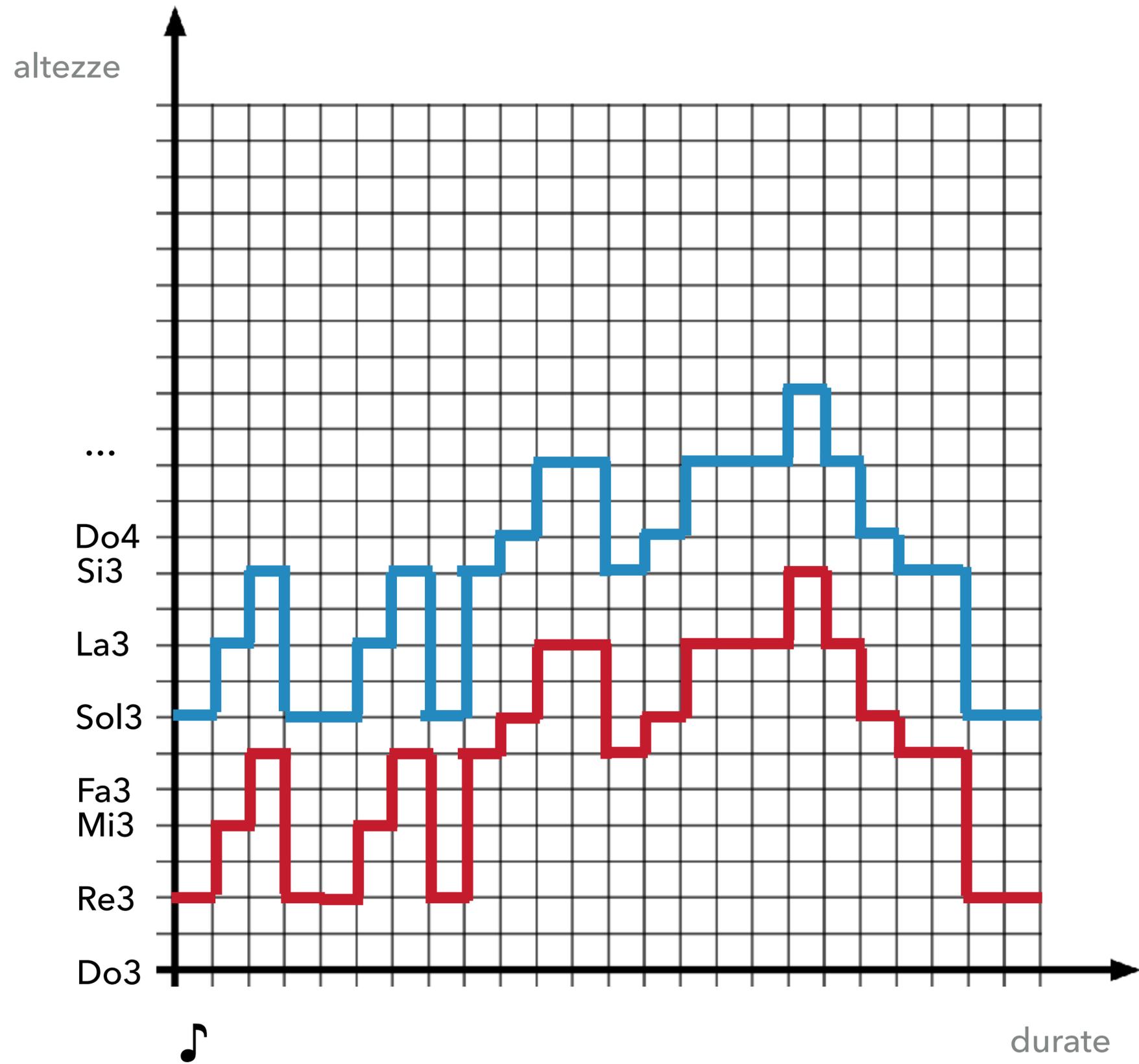
*pppp*   *ppp*   *pp*   *p*   *mp*   *mf*   *f*   *ff*   *fff*   *fff*

**ALTEZZE E DURATE  
NEL PIANO CARTESIANO**

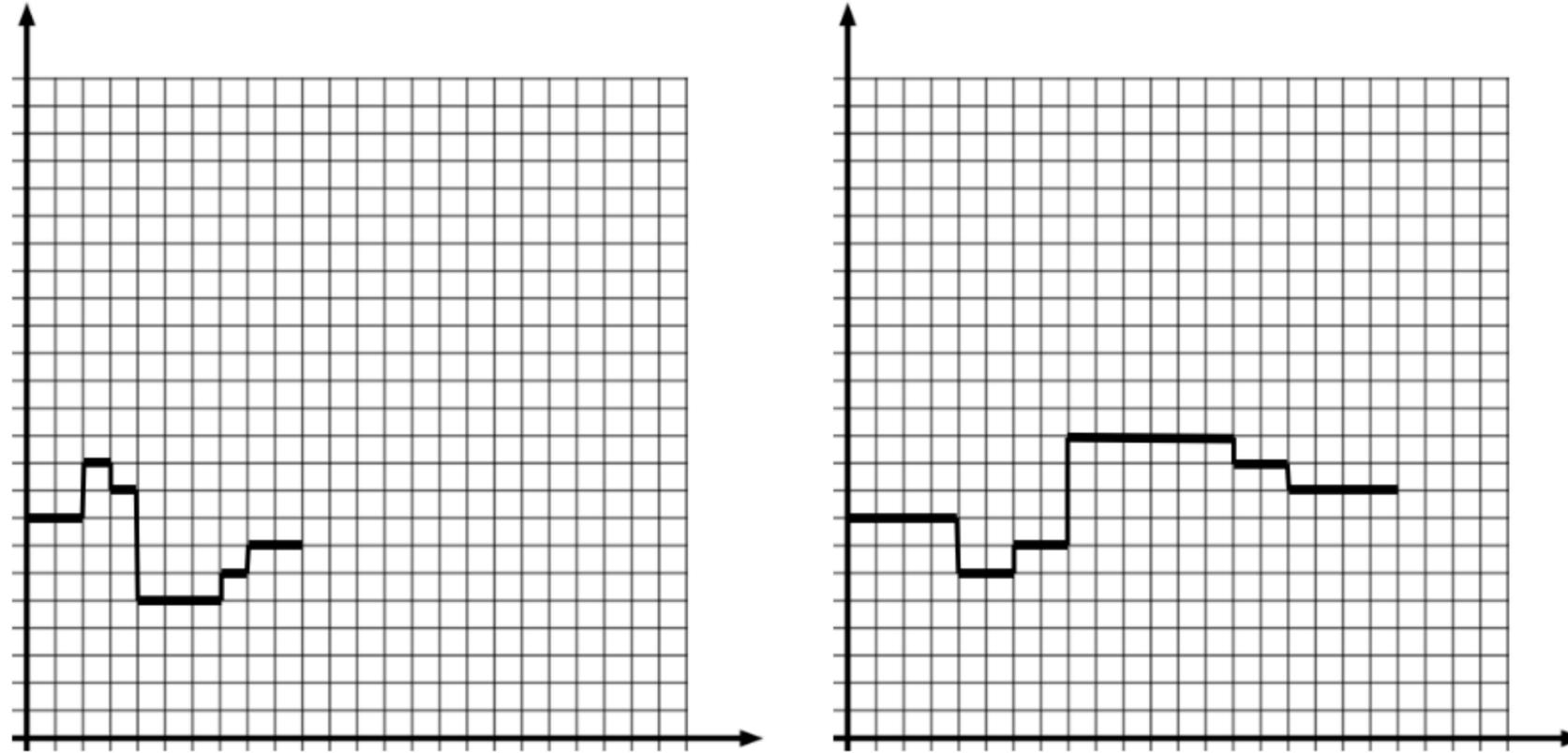








4) Osserva attentamente le seguenti due rappresentazioni:



Matematicamente, quella a destra corrisponde, rispetto a quella a sinistra, ad una:

- Combinazione di una traslazione e di uno stiramento.
- Combinazione di una simmetria rispetto ad un'asse parallelo a quello delle ascisse e di uno stiramento.
- Traslazione.

...in musica è come dire che si è operata una:

- Combinazione di una qualche inversione e aumentazione.
- Combinazione di trasposizione e aumentazione.
- Aumentazione.

5) Individua nel seguente passaggio tante più 'imitazioni' riconosci. Ricordati che puoi aiutarti rappresentandolo (per intero o in parte) su un piano cartesiano!

The image shows a musical score in 4/4 time, consisting of two staves: a treble staff and a bass staff. The treble staff begins with a treble clef and a 4/4 time signature. The first measure contains a series of eighth notes: G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, with a slur underneath. The second measure contains a dotted quarter note G4, followed by an eighth rest, a quarter note F4, and a quarter note E4. The third measure contains a whole note chord consisting of G4, B4, and D5. The fourth measure contains a dotted quarter note G4, followed by an eighth rest, a quarter note F4, and a quarter note E4. The fifth measure contains a dotted quarter note G4, followed by an eighth rest, a quarter note F4, and a quarter note E4. The bass staff begins with a bass clef and a 4/4 time signature. The first measure contains a whole rest. The second measure contains a dotted quarter note G3, followed by an eighth rest, a quarter note F3, and a quarter note E3. The third measure contains a dotted quarter note G3, followed by an eighth rest, a quarter note F3, and a quarter note E3. The fourth measure contains a dotted quarter note G3, followed by an eighth rest, a quarter note F3, and a quarter note E3. The fifth measure contains a dotted quarter note G3, followed by an eighth rest, a quarter note F3, and a quarter note E3.

**RAPPRESENTAZIONI**







«Le arti propriamente dette hanno una materia che esiste nel senso fisico della parola. La stessa poesia ha per materia il linguaggio visto come un insieme di suoni. La materia dell'arte matematica è una metafora; e a che cosa corrisponde questa metafora?»

Simone Weil, in Weil, Simone e André Weil. 2018. L'arte della matematica. Milano: Adelphi. p. 18.

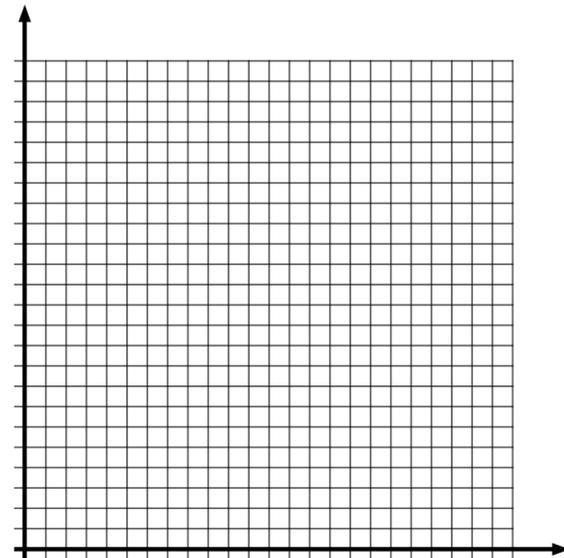
The pupils' response to the activity was then monitored via data collected from a final anonymous questionnaire. The first part of it was intended to assess their understanding of the concepts introduced through specific exercises and multiple-choice questions (with marks ranging from a minimum of zero to a maximum of twenty-three) while in the second part they were asked to state their satisfaction and engagement about the activity (totally ranging from zero to twelve). The average results for both classes are given in the following table that shows how class 3A, the one in which *bach* was introduced, got a much higher score in learning outcomes and a slightly higher one in satisfaction and engagement.

Group	Learning outcomes	Satisfaction
3A	17,80	10,04
3B	13,68	9,75

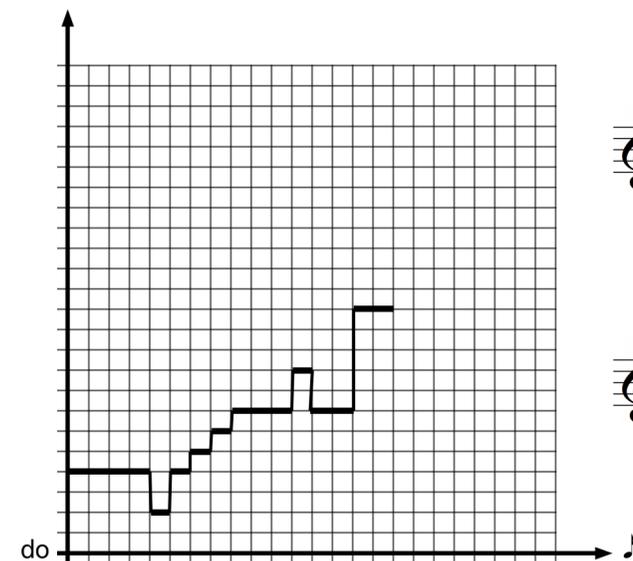
1) Dei quattro caratteri distintivi del suono, quali sono i due che abbiamo rappresentato durante la lezione nel piano cartesiano?

- Timbro e intensità.  Intensità e durata.  Altezza e durata.  Altezza e intensità.

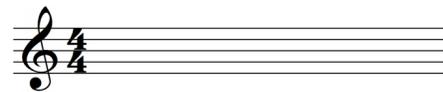
2) Rappresenta la seguente melodia nel piano cartesiano:



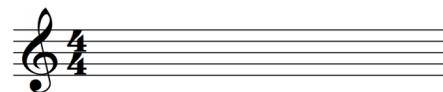
3) Trascrivi la seguente rappresentazione in note:



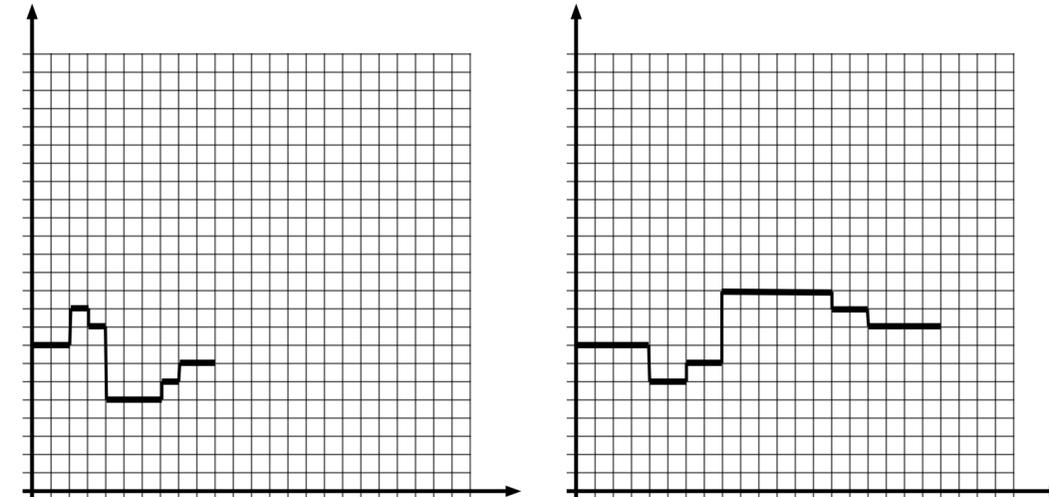
Brutta copia:



Bella copia:



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6) Ti è piaciuta questa lezione? (sii sincera/o, non mi offenderò e mi aiuterai a migliorare!)

- Sì, moltissimo!  Sì, molto.  Sì.  Poco.  No.  Proprio per niente!

7) Quanto hai trovato interessanti gli argomenti trattati?

- Moltissimo!  Molto.  Abbastanza.  Poco.  Non interessanti.  Per nulla!

# MATEMATICA E MUSICA

E ULTERIORI SPUNTI DIDATTICI...

► *Musikalisches Würfelspiel* (1787?).



**ISTRUZIONE**  
 Per comporre delle *Walzer*, oppure *Schleifer*  
 col mezzo di due Dadi, senza aver la minima  
 Notizia di musica, ovvero della composizione.

- 1.) Le Lettere A—H, poste sopra le otto Colonne delle tavole dei Numeri mostrano le 8. Battute di ciascheduna parte del *Walzer*, per esempio: A, la prima, B, la seconda, C, la terza, &c. e i Numeri nella colonna sotto le Lettere mostrano il Numero della battuta nelle note.
- 2.) I Numeri di 2. sino 12. mostrano la somma del Numero che si può gettare con due Dadi.
- 3.) Si getta dunque per esempio per la prima battuta della prima parte del *Walzer* con due dadi 6: cercando presso del numero 6. nella colonna A il numero della battuta 1-8. nella tavola della Musica, e mettendo questa battuta in carta, si ha trovato il principio del *Walzer*. Poi si getta per la seconda battuta per esempio 9. si cerca presso del 9. sotto B. e si trova N° 84. della tavola della Musica: scrivendo questa battuta a canto della prima, e continuando in questa guisa sino ad aver gettato otto volte i Dadi, si ha finito la prima parte del *Walzer*. Finalmente si fa il segno del Ritornello, e si comincia la seconda parte: quando si desidera un *Walzer* più lungo, si ricomincia nella stessa maniera, andando così sino all'infinito.

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
2	96	22	141	41	105	122	11	30
3	32	6	128	63	146	46	134	81
4	69	95	158	13	153	55	110	24
5	40	17	113	85	161	2	159	100
6	148	74	163	45	80	97	36	107
7	104	157	27	167	154	68	118	91
8	162	60	171	53	99	133	21	127
9	119	84	114	50	140	86	169	34
10	98	142	42	156	75	129	62	123
11	3	87	165	61	135	47	147	33
12	54	130	10	103	28	37	106	5

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
2	70	121	26	9	112	49	109	14
3	117	39	126	56	174	18	116	83
4	66	199	15	132	73	58	145	79
5	90	176	7	34	67	160	52	170
6	25	143	54	125	76	136	1	93
7	138	71	150	29	101	162	23	161
8	16	155	47	175	43	168	89	172
9	120	84	45	166	51	115	72	111
10	65	77	19	82	137	38	149	8
11	102	4	31	164	144	59	173	78
12	35	20	108	92	12	124	44	131

# Combinatorics, Probability and Choice in Music Composition: Towards an Aesthetics of Composing Systems for Non-Musicians

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## Abstract

The aim of this paper is to study how combinatorics and probability informed and can inform the aesthetics of composing systems for non-musicians. For this purpose, an historical example is taken into account, Mozart's *Musikalisches Würfelspiel* and it is compared with a contemporary digital system developed by the author with similar objectives, *Op. 60 Ricercari Diatonici*, for people, composing system and harpsichordist.

## Introduction

Combinatorial methods and systems for composing music meant for non-musicians have a long history, from Athanasius Kircher's *Arca Musarithmica* (1650) to the several systems - often referred as to 'games' - that were quite popular in the 18<sup>th</sup> century<sup>1</sup>. According to [4],

From 1757 to 1812 at least twenty musical dice games were published in Europe, some in several editions and languages. All made it possible for the person ignorant of music to write minuets, marches, polonaises, contredances, waltzes and so forth by selecting bits of prefabricated music through the use of chance operations.

Examples include: J. P. Kirnberger, *Der Allezeit Fertige Menuetten- und Polonaisencomponist* (1757), the anonymous *Ludus melothedicus* (1758), C. P. E. Bach, *Einfall, einen Doppelten Contrapunct in der Octave von Sechs Tacten zu Machen, Ohne die Regeln Davon zu Wissen* (1758); M. Stadler, *Table pour Composer des Minuets et des Trios à la infinie* (1780), P. Hoegi, *A Tabular System whereby the Art of Composing Minuets is Made so Easy that any Person, Without the Least Knowledge of Musick, may Compose Ten Thousand, all Different, and in the Most Pleasing and Correct Manner* (1770), J. F. Wiedeberg, *Musikalisches Chartenspiel* (1788), F. J. Haydn, *Philharmonic Joke* (1790), W. A. Mozart, *Musikalisches Würfelspiel* (1787/1792), A. Calegari, *Gioco Pitagorico* (1801) and G. Catrufo, *Bareme Musical* (1811).<sup>2</sup> Some of them let the aided non-musician *composer* choose the elements that compose the final work, some others leave them up to chance. Let us consider the latter, but notice also that the choices of a non-musician could be random as well, due to his or her alleged inability to read and understand them - or to try to evaluate them until the composition process has ended. In this context, to consider the system fair, it can be reasonably assumed that the following requirements are fulfilled: 1) the system outputs scores that have the same probability to come out and 2) all the outputs have the same artistic value. Therefore, I will consider a case model, Mozart's *Musikalisches Würfelspiel*, and I will show that not only the two aforesaid assumptions could not be true at all, but also that as a result there are some relevant aesthetic implications. I will then present *Op. 60*, a digital system I developed under the same aesthetic principles.

<sup>1</sup>The abundance of such games in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, in opposition to the absence in the 19<sup>th</sup>, had been well explained in [5], underlining that in the former "what constrained the choice of figures were the claims of taste, coherent expression and propriety", while in the latter it was "the inner necessity of a gradually unfolding, underlying process", which is much more difficult to schematize.

<sup>2</sup>In addition, some theorists of the 18<sup>th</sup> century based part of their composition treatises on combinatorial procedures, e.g. J. Riepel, *Grundregeln zur Tonordnung insgemein* (1755), J. P. Kirnberger, *Methode Sonaten aus'm Ermel zu Schüdden* (1783), H. C. Koch, *Versuch einer Anleitung zur Composition* (1782-1793) and F. Galeazzi, *Elementi Teorici-Pratici di Musica* (1791-1796).

W.A. Mozart, *Musikalisches Würfelspiel* (1787/1792)

**Quanti Valzer si possono comporre?**

W.A. Mozart, *Musikalisches Würfelspiel* (1787/1792)

$$6^6 = 379.749.833.583.241 \approx 379 \times 10^12$$

W.A. Mozart, *Musikalisches Würfelspiel* (1787/1792)

**Hanno tutti la stessa probabilità di apparire?**

W.A. Mozart, *Musikalisches Würfelspiel* (1787/1792)

**La probabilità di un punteggio  $p$  al lancio di  $n$  dadi a  $s$  facce è:**

$$P(p, n, s) = \frac{1}{s^n} \cdot \sum_{k=0}^{k_{max}} (-1)^k \binom{n}{k} \binom{p - sk - 1}{n - 1} \text{ with } k_{max} \text{ floor function of } \frac{p - n}{s}$$

W.A. Mozart, *Musikalisches Würfelspiel* (1787/1792)

**La probabilità di un punteggio  $p$  al lancio di  $n$  dadi a  $s$  facce è:**

$$P(p, n, s) = \frac{1}{s^n} \cdot \sum_{k=0}^{k_{max}} (-1)^k \binom{n}{k} \binom{p - sk - 1}{n - 1} \text{ with } k_{max} \text{ floor function of } \frac{p - n}{s}$$

**Che nel caso le facce siano sei e i dadi due corrisponde a:**

$$P(p, 2, 6) = \frac{6 - |p - 7|}{36} \text{ with } 2 \leq p \leq 12$$

W.A. Mozart, *Musikalisches Würfelspiel* (1787/1792)

[Andantino]

The image displays a musical score for W.A. Mozart's *Musikalisches Würfelspiel*. The score is written for piano and consists of two systems of music. The first system, measures 1-8, begins with the tempo marking [Andantino]. The right hand (treble clef) features a melodic line with eighth-note patterns, while the left hand (bass clef) provides a simple accompaniment with quarter notes and rests. A first ending bracket spans measures 7 and 8, with a second ending bracket also covering these measures. The second system, measures 9-18, continues the melodic and accompanimental patterns. The right hand has a more active role with sixteenth-note passages, and the left hand features a rhythmic accompaniment with eighth-note figures. The score concludes with a double bar line and repeat dots.

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