Music theory today has been defined as ‘principally the study of the structure of music’. It was not always so. Around the 1700s in regions dominated by Lutheranism, music theory had a far broader remit. Andreas Werckmeister’s definitive statement on music (1691), for example, has the title: *The Noble Art of Music: its Greatness, Use and Abuse explained from the Holy Scriptures, from some pure Old and New Church Doctrines and from the basics of Music itself*. For Werckmeister and his contemporaries, music theory was so tightly intertwined with Lutheran doctrine, that divergent views could be considered blasphemous.

Many great composers educated in the Thüringia/Saxony area viewed music in this same way. If we want fully to grasp the structure of their compositions it seems only reasonable, then, to try to understand music theory as they did.

Modern music theorists have tended to sift ‘the basics of Music’ from the wider view given in historical treatises. Rather than enriching our discipline, this selective approach has meant that vital information, that could have explained the motivation behind compositional choices, has been ignored.

This paper will use Bach’s numerical structures, Werckmeister’s definitions and some statements by the progressive thinker Mattheson to illustrate the benefits of a holistic approach towards music treatises. It will raise questions about the value and potential of recapturing the full complexity of historical music theories, with all that this could/not mean for the future ‘study of the structure of music’.