



# THE AMERICAN BACH SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Spring 2003

## Toward a 21st-Century Interpretation of Bach's *Ciaccona* for Solo Violin, BWV 1004/5

As is well known, dance played an important role in Baroque society, especially in France, where it became an integral part of large-scale theatrical productions. Nonetheless, the scholarly study of dance history is a relatively new development; thus, dance historians have only recently contributed significantly to our understanding of dance music. In particular, with the publication of *Dance and the Music of J. S. Bach* by Natalie Jenne and Meredith Little (Indiana University Press, 1991; expanded 2001), musicians were offered important and unique insights into the choreographic and musical characteristics of dances known to Bach and suggestions of how his music could be interpreted against this background.

It is because of the work of dance historians that I eventually came to believe that Bach's *Ciaccona* for solo violin, the last movement of the Partita in D minor, BWV 1004, ought to be interpreted primarily as a piece of stylized dance music, rather than an abstract, if monumental, set of variations played without reference to dance idioms. This latter way, of course, is how the work has been played by the last several generations of violinists. Moreover, those specializing in the baroque violin have not incorporated the dance element in their interpretations, even though they generally adopt somewhat livelier tempos. Indeed, even Jenne and Little assert that little of the dance remains in Bach's *Ciaccona*. Nonetheless, experiments with willing students have convinced me that, despite the complexity of texture and other non-dance elements incorporated in this multifaceted work, the most fundamental features of Bach's *Ciaccona* are those of the French theatrical *passacaille*, and that performing tempo, style, and affect should reflect this. This results in a work radically different from that we are accustomed to hearing.

Because his works went completely out of style from the 18th century to the very recent past, the

### *In this issue:*

<i>Toward a 21st-Century Interpretation of Bach's Ciaccona, Raymond Erickson</i> .....	1
<i>News from Members</i> .....	2
<i>Call for Papers</i> .....	2
<i>RBI Fellowship</i> .....	2
<i>Spring Book Discounts</i> .....	3
<i>Book Review, Matthew Dirst</i> .....	4
<i>CD Review, Teri Noel Towe</i> .....	4
<i>Select Bibliography, Yo Tomita</i> .....	6
<i>Spring Book Discounts (2)</i> .....	8
<i>Bach Festivals</i> .....	11

importance of Jean-Baptiste Lully for Bach's world has often been underestimated. But Lully was one of the most powerful musicians in the history of Western music, with every European country caught up in his thrall. Certainly this was true for Germany, and one need only count the many French ouvertures and dances that Bach composed—not to mention the use of overture and dance features in non-dance works—to recognize the enormous influence exercised by French theatrical and dance music even in the German Protestant world. It is thus perhaps significant that, among the substantial body of scores purchased by the young, music-loving Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Cöthen on his grand tour of 1710–13, the only work listed by title in the inventory of expenses is a score of Lully's *Phaeton* purchased in Amsterdam on July 21, 1711, four months after a very large expenditure “vor drey rare opern von Lully” (see Gunter Hoppe, “Köthener politische, ökonomische und höfische Verhältnisse als Schaffensbedingungen Bachs [Teil 1],” *Cöthener-Bach-Hefte* 4 [1986], 27). This certainly suggests that Lully was held in high regard even by the Calvinist Leopold, Bach's employer at the time the unaccompanied violin music was finished. The most famous of Lully's large-scale dance numbers was the “Passacaille” from *Armide*. It is not possible to say that *Armide* was one of the “drei rare

(continued on p. 5)

## News from Members

**Robert M. Cammarota's** 1998 AMS paper "On the Performance of 'Quia respexit . . . omnes generationes' from J. S. Bach's *Magnificat*" was recently published in *The Journal of Musicology* 18 (2001): 458–89.

**Robert Clark** has recorded Bach's *Clavierübung III* on the Richards Fowkes organ at Westminster Presbyterian Church, Knoxville, Tennessee on a two-CD set for Calcante.

**Richard Coffey, Louis Nuechterlein, and John Yocom** participated in a four-part pre-concert series held in conjunction with Mr. Coffey's performance of Bach's *Mass in B minor* with the Connecticut Choral Artists.

**Raymond Erickson** is presenting lectures and masterclasses on Bach's *Ciaconna* at the Juilliard School, the University of Alabama-Tuscaloosa (under the auspices of the University's Endowed Chair in Music program), and elsewhere.

**Richard Erickson** will be conducting Bach Vespers with the Holy Trinity Bach Choir this summer for the National Conference of the Lutheran Association of Church Musicians.

**Anne Leahy** has received a Fulbright scholarship for research into text-music relationships in Bach's *B-minor Mass*, and has been appointed as the first visiting Gerhard Herz Professor of Music at the University of Louisville beginning fall 2003.

**Joan Parsley** presented an educational program, "Bach's Building Blocks," for third and fourth graders in the Milwaukee school system, as part of an alliance between the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra's arts and community education project and the Milwaukee Baroque.

**Joseph P. Swain's** article "Harmonic Rhythm in Bach's Ritornellos" will appear this summer in the *Journal of Musicological Research* 22/3, and his new book, *Harmonic Rhythm: Analysis and Interpretation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) has a critical essay on the *Preludio* from Bach's E-major Violin Partita, BWV 1006/1, as well as shorter analyses of several other Bach works.

**Teri Noel Towe** has been elected to the board of The American Friends of Dresden, a not-for-profit corporation that raises funds to assist in the reconstruction and restoration of the *Frauenkirche* and other historic monuments in Dresden and other parts of Saxony.

**Allan Vogel** has recorded Bach's Concerto for Violin and Oboe, BWV 1060, with the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra for Deutsche Grammophon, for release in fall 2003, and has recently performed the work with the St. Louis and Phoenix Symphony Orchestras.

## Call for Papers

The American Bach Society will hold its biennial meeting on April 16–18, 2004 at Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey, on the theme "Images of Bach." The ABS invites proposals for papers on all aspects of Bach research, especially on the theme of the conference. Proposals should include a brief (250–400-word) abstract that emphasizes the results and significance of original research. Abstracts should be submitted by September 1, 2003 to Daniel R. Melamed at <melamed@americanbachsociety.org>. Please include complete contact information. For more information on the conference please visit the American Bach Society website.

## Riemenschneider Bach Institute Fellowship

The Riemenschneider Bach Institute announces the Martha Goldworthy Arnold visiting academic research fellowship, tenable for four-week periods from September 1, 2003 thru June 30, 2004. The fellowship is for full-time residential research involving the extensive Bach-oriented resources of the Riemenschneider Bach Institute, and carries a monthly stipend of U.S.\$1,500.00. The fellowship is open to scholars who already hold the Ph.D. as well as to doctoral candidates engaged in dissertation research in the humanities, the social sciences, or in a professional field such as music performance, but exceptions may be made for individuals without continuous academic careers. Applications (in English only) must include cover letter, 2–3 page proposal (single-spaced), 1–2 page curriculum vitae, list of RBI materials to be used, two letters of reference, and a proposed schedule and budget. Applications must be submitted by April 15, 2003 to Dr. Mel Unger, Director, Riemenschneider Bach Institute, Baldwin-Wallace College, 275 Eastland Road, Berea OH 44017. For further information, contact the Riemenschneider Bach Institute at 440-826-2207 or <LKennell@bw.edu>.

Have you visited our website?  
[www.americanbachsociety.org](http://www.americanbachsociety.org)

## Spring Book Discounts

**W. W. Norton & Co.** will offer members of the American Bach Society a 20-percent discount on the following titles:

David, Hans T., Arthur Mendel, and Christoph Wolff, eds. *The New Bach Reader. A Life of Johann Sebastian Bach in Letters and Documents* (1998); 0-393-31956-3; paper; 511 pp.; list price: \$19.95; with discount: **\$15.95**

Wolff, Christoph, et al, *The New Grove Bach Family* (1983); 0-393-30354-3; paper; 372 pp.; list price: \$15.95; with discount: **\$12.75**

Wolff, Christoph, *The World of the Bach Cantatas: Johann Sebastian Bach's Early Sacred Cantatas* (1997); 0-393-04106-9; cloth; 226 pp.; list price \$35.00; with discount: **\$28.00**

Wolff, Christoph, *Johann Sebastian Bach: The Learned Musician* (2000); 0-393-04825-x; cloth; 544 pp.; list price: \$39.95; with discount: **\$31.95**. Paper 0-393-32256-4; list price: \$18.95; with discount: **\$15.16**

Bach, C.P.E., *Essay on the True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments* (trans. William J. Mitchell) (1949); 0-393-09916-1; cloth; 449 pp.; \$30.00 net.

Bach, Johann Sebastian, *Cantata No. 4. Christ lag in Todesbanden* (Norton Critical Score, Gerhard Herz, ed.) (1967); 0-393-09761-7; paper; 138 pp.; \$11.75 net.

Bach, Johann Sebastian, *Cantata No. 140. Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme* (Norton Critical Score, Gerhard Herz, ed.) (1972); 0-393-09555-x; paper; 175 pp.; \$11.75 net.

### TO PLACE AN ORDER

Within U.S. and Canada, add \$4.00 for shipping the first book, and \$1.00 for each additional book. Outside U.S. and Canada, add \$6.00 for the first book, and \$2.00 for each additional book. All shipments will be sent via surface mail. Draw check to "American Bach Society," and send with order to Frank Morana, Editor / ABS Newsletter / 22-24 Rosol Lane / Saddle Brook NJ 07663.

**THESE ORDERS MUST BE RECEIVED  
BY APRIL 30, 2003 AND WILL BE  
PROCESSED IN BULK ON MAY 1, 2003**

## Book Review

**David Ledbetter. *Bach's Well-tempered Clavier: The 48 Preludes and Fugues* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002). xvi + 414 pp.**

Hats off to David Ledbetter for his splendid new book on the *Well-Tempered Clavier*. Aficionados of Bach's keyboard music will find much of interest here, in the first English-language study of the 48 preludes and fugues in more than a quarter of a century. A more comprehensive study than Alfred Dürr's *Das Wohltemperierte Klavier* (Bärenreiter, 1998) and more directly pertinent to the *WTC* than David Schulenberg's *The Keyboard Music of J. S. Bach* (Schirmer, 1992), Ledbetter's latest is the best book yet on this cornerstone of the Western canon.

Like Bach's music, Ledbetter's book is both learned and practical. This author knows a great deal about the "48" and the musical traditions that inspired them; thankfully, he also knows how to present his material in a highly readable way. The first six chapters set an admirably detailed context by addressing essential topics—keyboard instruments and tuning systems of Bach's day, and various kinds of prelude and fugues—as well as German Baroque harmonic theory and Bach's keyboard pedagogy. In the second half of the book Ledbetter takes up each of the preludes and fugues in turn, in discussions that range freely from source-critical issues to questions of performance practice.

Throughout he displays an impressive familiarity with potential models for these pieces, the particular pedagogical issues Bach addressed in them, the interpretive and technical problems they pose, and the literature devoted to them. Ledbetter's lucid discussions of individual preludes and fugues, grounded in a thorough understanding of genre and style as defined and articulated by writers of Bach's time, are unencumbered by any particular analytic strategy (the text is blessedly free of graphs and tables). They are nevertheless packed with insight and provocative allusion—more than one can possibly use, really, but in this case that's a good thing, since the music itself is so endlessly fascinating. Ledbetter's ideas about performance may not appeal to everyone, but they are undeniably sensible, reflecting an intimate acquaintance with the music and an uncommon sensitivity to historic keyboard techniques and instruments.

Other noteworthy features of the book include a frank discussion of the merits of various "control" editions (those produced by the *Neue Bach Ausgabe*, edited by Alfred Dürr, and the Associated Board of The Royal

Schools of Music, edited by Richard Jones), a strong case for harpsichord as opposed to clavichord performance, and appendices that include, among other things, all four versions of the C-sharp minor Fugue in Book Two.

—Matthew Dirst

## CD Review

**Pathos und Freude, Orgelwerke von J. S. Bach. Martin Sander, 1740–41 Joachim Wagner organ, Nidaros Cathedral, Trondheim, Norway. Fermate CD FER 20028 (64:31). BWV 525, 552, 582, 596, 659–661.**

The 1740–1741 two manual and pedal organ in the Nidaros Cathedral in Trondheim, Norway, contains more original pipework by the Berlin-based builder Joachim Wagner than any of his other surviving instruments. When it was supplanted by the 127-rank Steinmeyer organ familiar to those who know E. Power Biggs's groundbreaking mid-1950's set of LPs, *The Art of the Organ* (Columbia KL-219), its pipework and windchests fortunately were not trashed. They languished, unmolested, in the crypt of the Cathedral, among the tombs of Norwegian royalty, for six decades. Jürgen Ahrend completed a careful restoration in 1995, and the 29 stops of this extraordinary organ once again speak in a manner that Sebastian Bach, who dubbed Wagner's instrument in Potsdam's *Garnisonkirche* a "gar prächtig Werk," would find familiar and praiseworthy.

Bach likely would praise Martin Sander's organ playing, too. A pupil of Ulrich Bremsteller who has won a number of major prizes, he plays with flair, understanding, and complete technical security. Sander's HIP-aware interpretations are thoughtful, stylish, and imaginative, and his phrasing and legato are superb, but the added embellishments, particularly in BWV 525, may prove a bit too opulent for some tastes. Producer-engineer Ludger Böckenhoff has captured the sound of the Wagner organ magnificently; the balance of clarity and ambience is perfect. The booklet contains a complete stop list, registrations, and essays on the music and organ in both German and English.

Recommended, especially to those interested in the sound of the organs built by the makers Bach knew.

—Teri Noel Towe

## Bach's *Ciaccona* (continued from p. 1)

opern von Lully" Leopold bought in Holland or that the prince acquired there the *Ouverture Chaconne* [sic] & tous les autres Airs à jouer de l'Opera *Armide* par Mr. Lully [sic] published by Roger in Amsterdam about the time of the Prince's six-month stay, during which he frequently attended the opera at The Hague. But whether or not Leopold brought the score of *Armide* back with him, the "Passacaille" from *Armide* enjoyed an enormous reputation, being extant today not only in printed editions and manuscript copies of the opera, but also in about 30 other manuscript sources, plus at least six transcriptions (mainly for harpsichord) (see Herbert Schneider, *Chronologisch-thematisches Verzeichnis sämtlicher Werke von Jean-Baptiste Lully* (Tutzing: Hans Schneider, 1981), 465f. and 478f.); this includes the published transcription by D'Anglebert that appeared in his *Pieces de Clavecin* (Paris, 1689), a work that Bach knew, since he extracted some of the table of ornaments for inclusion in the *Clavierbüchlein für Wilhelm Friedemann Bach*.

Even if the "Passacaille" from *Armide* did not directly inspire Bach in the creation of the *Ciaccona*, they share large-scale structures, paired variations over minor descending tetrachords and characteristic dance rhythms in much of the work. Moreover, the modal sectionalization of minor-major-minor is another French trait (Louis Couperin's *Passacaille* in G minor comes immediately to this harpsichordist's mind). All of these features, basic to the overall impression the work makes on the listener, suggest a 17th-century French rather than Italian model as Bach's starting point, despite the Italian title and some Italianate variation techniques.

Consideration of the title opens the Pandora's box of terminological problems that has been treated at length in several articles by Alexander Silbiger. (Silbiger feels that Bach may well have known the "Passacaille" from *Armide*, but sees its possible influence more on the opening movement of Cantata 78.) He has shown that the terms *passacaglia*, *passacaille*, *ciaccona*, and *chaccone* are often used interchangeably. I do not dispute this, but would merely point out that, in Lully's practice, the *passacaille* is something different from the Italian *passacaglia* and is also normally differentiated from the *chaccone*. More specifically, the four *passacailles* in the Lully operas are, save one, in minor mode: such works (according to writers

of the time) are slower than the lively, more numerous major-mode *chaccones*. In "Interpreting pendulum markings for French Baroque dances," *Historical Performance* 6/1 (Spring 1993), 13, Rebecca Harris-Warrick states that "in [early-18th-century] France, at least, there was an unambiguous differentiation between these two dances on the basis of tempo, the *chaccone* being approximately half again as fast as the *passacaille*." A dramatic example of this difference can be found in Charpentier's *Médée*, where a lively *chaccone* in major is followed by a slower *passacaille* in minor. For all these reasons I think that the term *passacaille* is the single best word to use in describing the essence of Bach's *Ciaccona*. (The fact that Bach's *Ciaccona* begins on the second beat—more characteristic of the *chaccone*—rather than the first beat, on which all of Lully's *passacailles* begin, is for me less important than the tempo/affect issue; besides, no one feature is always present in these pieces. For example, *chaccones* are normally supposed to begin on the second beat, yet a great many of Lully's do not.)

Then why the Italian title? First of all, Silbiger has certainly proven a certain flexibility in terminology, which suggests that *Ciaccona* was merely one of several possible titles available to Bach. Second, we have, in Bach's "French Suites" for keyboard, examples of the French term "Courante" being applied to works that, according to their musical style, ought to be labeled with the Italian term "Corrente," so Bach himself would appear to have been somewhat loose with his titles. But in any case we should not forget that Bach's *Ciaccona* appears in a French-style dance suite (albeit with the overall Italian designation "Partita") and that there are the above-cited formal links as well.

All this has other important implications for performing Bach's *Ciaccona*, which is my primary concern. Research on French dances has put the Lullian *passacaille* tempo in the range of 90–105, as compared with 120–160 for the *chaccone* (see Klaus Miehling, *Das Tempo in der Musik von Barock und Vorklassik* [Wilhelmshaven: Florian Noetzel Verlag "Heinrichshofen Bucher," 1993], and Alexander Silbiger, "Chaconne," in *New Grove*, revised edition). But Lully's *passacailles* move mainly in quarter- and eighth-notes, with occasional sixteenths, whereas Bach's work, in addition to requiring multiple stops, moves largely

(continued on p. 10)

# Select Bibliography

This selective list of new Bach publications is compiled annually by Yo Tomita, whose extensive online *Bach Bibliography* can be accessed at <homepages.bw.edu/bachbib>, a new, faster mirror service set up at the Riemenschneider Bach Institute in October 2002.

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## Spring Book Discounts

**Oxford University Press** will offer members of the American Bach Society a 20-percent discount on the following titles:

Paul Badura-Skoda, *Interpreting Bach at the Keyboard*, trans. Alfred Clayton (1995); 0-19-816576-5; paper; 592 pp.; list price: \$37.00; with discount: **\$29.60**

Malcolm Boyd, *Bach* (3rd ed., 2001); 0-19-514222-5; cloth; 344 pp.; list price \$35.00; with discount: **\$28.00**

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## Bach's *Ciaccona* (continued from p. 5)

in sixteenths, and even in thirty-second notes, putting a natural brake on the tempo, as treatises of the period indicate a plethora of short note-values should do. Nonetheless, the dance character can be captured in the *Ciaccona* at a playable tempo of about quarter-note=80, which, although somewhat slower than the danced *passacailles*, is still faster than the work, or at least the opening, has been played traditionally. (A sampling of recordings reveals a range from quarter-note=38 by Itzhak Perlman, to 74 by Thomas Zehetmair on modern violin; and from 44 by Christoph Poppen and 68 by Lucy Van Dael on baroque violin. Playing the *Ciaccona* at something close to a true *chaccone* tempo is course, totally out of the question.) But tempo is not the main issue: it is conveying the dance character convincingly. What is required most of all is abandoning the deeply entrenched attitude towards the *Ciaccona* as an unrelentingly serious, even lament-like work, subject to great “expressive” fluctuations in tempo, and making it “dance” with lightness, elegance, and greater consistency of tempo; this is not to deny that the work contains virtuoso passages with little dance feeling. Like so many of Bach's works, the *Ciaccona* is a unique synthesis of many elements. The question here is: which elements determine the overall character of the work?

Although as a harpsichordist I prefer to work with period instruments, there is no reason why some of the newly-won understanding about baroque performance practices cannot be applied to modern instruments. Indeed, the ideas I have expressed above have developed while working with students who play the modern violin and who have rarely, if ever, played the baroque violin. The modern Tourte bow (which entered the scene c.1790) is a magnificent musical tool and can be employed to obtain the kind of articulation that is obtained naturally with a baroque bow. It is just that players of the modern violin do not think of playing Bach that way. But, with practice, a good modern violinist can pronounce the musical line so that “good” and “bad” notes result from a heavier downbow and lighter upbow, tension is reduced by less emphasis on volume for its own sake, Bach's articulation marks are really observed (with greater rhythmic interest the result), and vibrato, which is not only unstylish but which tends to cause the tempo to drag, is virtually done away with. This last, however, cannot be satisfactorily

accomplished with the use of steel strings, the harsh sound of which requires vibrato to beautify the sound. Therefore, the use of one or more gut strings, especially E and A, is recommended, although for D and G there is also a new type of synthetic string sold under the name “Obbligato” that combines the respective advantages of gut and steel without their disadvantages. But at bottom the issue is not the instrument but the way one plays it.

The case for *Ciaccona*-as-lament has been made recently by the German violin teacher Helga Thoene, whose ideas govern the interpretation of the D-minor Partita as recorded by Christoph Poppen in the best-selling, Grammy Award-winning ECM CD “Morimur.” Elsewhere I have shown the inconsistency in Thoene's arguments and will not detail them here (see Raymond Erickson, “Secret Codes, Dance, and Bach's Great *Ciaccona*,” *Early Music America* 8/2 [Summer 2002], 34ff.). Suffice it to say, however, that her ideas merely serve to reinforce the interpretive tradition being challenged here.

In sum, thanks to dance historians and their dancer colleagues, music historians who have made us more fully aware of the richness and unique style of French baroque music, and performers who have helped restore lost techniques of performance, we are in a position to reinterpret Bach's great *Ciaccona* for the 21st century on the basis of liberating new knowledge won in the 20th. True, this requires giving up some cherished notions about the work that are deeply embedded in the modern tradition of playing it. Nonetheless, as Lukas Foss credits Schoenberg with teaching him, “Tradition is a home we must love and forgo.”

—Raymond Erickson

[An abbreviated version of this paper—supplemented by a performance of the *Ciaccona*—was presented at the American Bach Society biennial meeting in Houston, Texas in April 2002.]



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