

Abstracts (ABS Philadelphia)

Friday, 7 October 2022

Keynote Address

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[Abstract Forthcoming]

Session I: Bach and Authority/Bach Authorities

Daniel R. Melamed—"Christ lag in Todes Banden" BWV 4, a Weimar Easter Cantata

Nearly every authority assigns J. S. Bach's "Christ lag in Todes Banden" BWV 4 to the years 1707-8 and regards it as originating before the composer's turn to mixed-text librettos. But the chronology is open because the oldest source is a set of performing parts prepared in 1724 and first used in 1725. The early date is thus speculative, and problematic.

Most suspicious is the presence of modern ritornello forms in movements 3, 4, and 7—ostinato types in nos. 3 and 7, and something closer to a *fortspinnung* type in no. 4—pointing to a later origin. The work's five-part string ensemble, with two violins and two violas, aligns better with Bach's Weimar cantatas than with the very early works.

Also telling is Bach's consistent use of a tonal version of the chorale tune—with a raised leading tone as the second note—motivically in the opening *sinfonia* and duet no. 3, and as a pun on the lamento bass in no. 6. That tonal version was not to be found in contemporary hymnals; even Telemann's *Lieder-Buch* of 1730 prefers the lowered seventh, with the leading-tone as a footnoted alternative. Significantly, the modal version is used throughout Johann Pachelbel's concerted setting of "Christ lag in Todes Banden," almost certainly Bach's model for BWV 4.

Bach's cantata is best viewed as an updating of Pachelbel's work, starting with a tonal treatment of the melody but also applying other modern musical techniques that Bach began to use only in the 1710s. BWV 4 is thus significant not as an old-fashioned work but rather as a retrospective one. It is best regarded as a composition from Bach's time in Weimar that takes a modern view of something old. That makes it even more interesting, even if acknowledging this represents a challenge to authority.

Michael Maul—On a highly explosive political stage: Bach's trip to Potsdam, the "Musical Offering" and its context

Johann Sebastian Bach traveled to Potsdam in May 1747 to perform music in front of Frederick the Great. Less than two months later, the Thomaskantor, Royal Polish and Electoral Saxon court composer dedicated the "Musical Offering" to the Prussian regent: "most humbly" and full of admiration for Frederick's skills in music and "in all the sciences of war and peace." In view of the highly explosive political relations between Saxony and Prussia in the aftermath of the Treaty of Dresden following the Battle of Kesselsdorf (December 1745), this was a remarkable step - a step which, in my opinion, was a domestic political affront by the Saxon "court composer", in the context of which the behavior of the Saxon prime minister Brühl in June 1749, who at that time forced an audition of his Kapelldirektor Harrer for the Thomaskantorat, must certainly also be seen.

On the basis of newly discovered and well-known sources, I would like to explain in my presentation the contemporary historical context of Bach's musical kneeling before Frederick the Great, speculate about

the purpose of his Potsdam journey, ask about the backers and consequences, and also specify the role of Hermann Carl Reichsgraf von Keyserlingk.

Session II: Cantatas as Reflections of Authority Structures

Vivian Tompkins—Deathly Devotion: Eighteenth-Century Capital Punishment and the Church Cantatas of J. S. Bach

In the pages of the *Riemerchronik*, an eighteenth-century Leipzig chronicle, sporadic details of Johann Sebastian Bach's professional activities sit alongside gruesome scenes of capital punishment. The printed pamphlets in which these scenes appear served to advertise executions and to demonstrate the consequences of transgressing against state and religious authorities. They also tended to include the texts of songs supposedly sung by the criminal or otherwise associated with their death. Such songs were often modeled on chorale texts and linked with particular hymn tunes, many of which also appear in Bach's church cantatas. Since executions drew large crowds, it is probable that congregants who heard Bach's music would have associated certain chorales in his works with the bloody spectacle of executions. Yet while scholars have examined the place of chorales in Leipzig's liturgies, their role in execution ceremonies remains to be explored.

My paper investigates this subject through a case study of the chorale "Wer weiß, wie nahe mir mein Ende." This chorale appears in multiple execution pamphlets from the period, most frequently in connection with the executions of women accused of infanticide. I follow the circulation of "Wer weiß" between the church and the scaffold, tracing its appearance in Bach's church cantatas and in the execution pamphlets printed during his Leipzig years. I also examine handwritten execution accounts from the *Riemerchronik*, published writings on executions and chorale singing, devotional music publications, sermons, and city ordinances and regulations. By exploring the circulation of "Wer weiß" in relation to these sources, I show how the association of certain chorales with executions, and with specific crimes such as infanticide, would have allowed Bach's church cantatas to serve as a way for congregants to learn and practice their roles as witnesses to and musical participants in the deadly exercise of state and religious authority.

William Cowdery—Bach, Weimar, and the Hunt

During Bach's tenure, Weimar had two coregent dukes, the senior Wilhelm Ernst and his nephew Ernst August. Bach's official duties lay mainly under the former, but he had a close friendship with the latter. A keen music lover, Ernst August also had a passion for the hunt and, incidentally, a fine collection of hunting horns. In 1716, to honor the duke's 28th birthday on April 19, Bach revived his "hunt cantata," BWV 208, written three years earlier for Weißenfels.

I would propose that three more works bear reconstructible birthday horn tributes to Ernst August. These would be unique horn parts in Bach's Weimar chapel output.

1714 April 22 (Jubilate Sunday): BWV 12/6, final aria, "Sei getreu."

This aria's *cantus firmus* for "Tromba" makes contrapuntal sense when treated as a horn part, played an octave lower (hear digital reconstruction).

1715 April 21 (Easter Sunday): BWV 31/8, final aria, "Letzte Stunde, brich herein."

This aria's *cantus firmus*, played in Leipzig by unison strings, makes sense when reconstructed as a horn part; diplomatic evidence strengthens this suggestion (hear digital reconstruction).

1716 April 26 (Misericordias Sunday): BWV 1046/3 (Brandenburg I/3)

This sinfonia makes sense with strings in D choir-pitch, and winds in F chamber-pitch, which fits Weimar chapel standards. Bach wrote no cantata for this Sunday, but he could have written this sinfonia for the same instrumentalists who had performed his “hunt cantata” a few days earlier, including two visiting hornists from Weißenfels.

Saturday, 8 October 2022

Session III: Performing Authority

Tanya Kevorkian—J. S. Bach: In a Web of Authority Relations

J. S. Bach was embedded in complex webs of authority. This paper, informed by Christopher Small’s call in *Musicking* to consider all actors involved in and present at a musical performance, examines Bach’s interactions with those actors through the lens of cantata preparation and performance. Issues of authority shaped those interactions, but in multi-faceted fashion. The focus is on the musicians who copied and performed Bach’s Leipzig cantatas under his direction: town musicians and St. Thomas School and University students. City councilors play a minor role.

Students gained money and experience by performing and copying parts en route to careers as musicians, while Bach needed performers and musical parts. Bach gave his musicians sonic and religious authority via music heard by an audience of thousands: boys and young men received spectacular arias, and town musicians memorable obbligato and solo parts. BWV 51, “Jauchzet Gott in allen Landen,” is a case study. Considerable evidence points to its performance in September 1730, during a brief hopeful time for Bach after the arrival of a new St. Thomas School rector who smoothed a dysfunctional situation.¹ It showcases a young soprano, likely Christoph Nichelmann, with town musicians Gottfried Reiche and Christian Rother on trumpet and first violin; Bach listed them on those instruments in his “Draft.” Nichelmann’s performance, shortly before his admission to St. Thomas, could have been a statement to the authorities that “this is what we can do.” Through the solo violin turn with its pun on “cross/burden,” Bach perhaps acknowledged to Rother difficulty surrounding a town musician position. Reiche was king of the trumpet.

This paper, based on research in the Stadtarchiv Leipzig, cantata scores and parts, and the *Bach-Dokumente*, adapts material from Chapter 3 of my forthcoming book *Music and Urban Life in Baroque Germany* (University of Virginia Press, this April/May).

Ray Erickson—Bach and the False Authority of Tradition: The Case of the Violin Ciaccona BWV 1004/5

It is hard to imagine a musical work by Bach that is more iconic than the finale (Ciaccona) of his Partita No. 2 in D minor for unaccompanied violin. At the same time, it is hard to find a musical masterpiece whose performance tradition is so at odds with the historical evidence. The rise of the early music movement and reintroduction of baroque instruments and performing practices have caused many to rethink how to play this great work in terms of violin technique (bowing, vibrato, fingering, etc.) but few have thought deeply about what kind of piece it really is or how the performance tradition associated with it came to be.

¹ Michael Maul reconstructs the St. Thomas background (*Bach’s Famous Choir*) without reference to BWV 51. Biographies also say little about this cantata, whose exuberance is at odds with Bach’s August “Draft” and October letter to Georg Erdmann (Wolff 2000, Gardiner 2013, Schulenberg 2020).

This paper--based on new, previously unreported research--is primarily concerned with the latter points. It will show that, in fact, there is no historical justification for the generally held notion that the character of Bach's Ciaccona is one of seriousness, tragedy, or encoded religiosity—qualities 19th-century German musicians felt, and musicians even today still feel intrinsic to this music. In fact, Bach's great work comes out of a varied tradition of pieces that can be monumental, to be sure, but also secular, fast, exotic, sexual, and truly dance-oriented. This claim is based not only on a fresh study of hundreds of ciacconas/chaconnes and passacaglias/passacailles that preceded Bach's work of 1720 but also on a new, systematic search of 19th-century newspapers, music periodicals, music dictionaries, and histories of music that reveal scant knowledge of the French baroque theatrical chaconne (and passacaille) on which Bach's Ciaccona is clearly based in terms of form and style. Thus, the paper will conclusively demonstrate that, when the work received its first clearly documented public performance in 1840, it was performed in a vacuum of historical knowledge, launching a tradition that has not only remained dominant for almost two centuries but is based on fallacious premises.

Session IV: Panel Discussion-Biography as Act of Authority

Participants: Ellen T. Harris, David Schulenberg, Christoph Wolff, Steven D. Zohn

Session V: Expanding Tradition: Bach in Modern Contexts David Chin—Bach in the Far East

This paper will explore Bach activities in Malaysia in recent years, particularly since the founding of Bachfest Malaysia in 2015. The paper focuses on four aspects:

1. The reception of Bach's music, particular his sacred vocal works, in a young country governed under Islamic laws and authorities.

In this section, a general historical, cultural, and musical background of Malaysia will be introduced, followed by stories from the premiere performances of Bach's major vocal works in West Malaysia, as well as all the major cities in East Malaysia (Borneo), where people listened to Bach works performed live for the very first time.

2. The introduction of historical-informed Bach performances in Malaysia and the challenges from "musical authorities".

This section will address the conflicts between two or even three generations of musicians in Malaysia and within the region on the topic of historical-informed performance since the founding of Bachfest Malaysia, and what have been done to resolve and refine the situations through the support of "Bach authorities" from the West.

3. The history and contributions of Christianity and Church authorities to the development of sacred music performance in Malaysia.

Audiences in the Western world could easily and completely separate performances of Bach's sacred works from the church, while that is not necessary the case in Malaysia. Many people still strongly associate Bach to Christianity because of the unique religious and cultural developments in Malaysia. Both the advantages and disadvantages in this respect will be discussed.

4. The future of Bach activities in Malaysia, South East Asia, and Asia.

This final section of the paper will explore the possible future for Bach activities in Malaysia and among the region, address the challenges which still need to be confronted, and provide suggestions for improvements and progress to the development.

Thomas Cressy—“Bach is my God”: Excess and Virtuosity in 1980s Metal

Bach has been the inspiration for musicians working in various genres of popular music: baroque-pop and psychedelia in the mid-late sixties, progressive rock of the 1970s, and various forms of jazz music since the 1930s. However, after the punk explosion (of the late 1970s) killed off experimental rock music as a commercially viable movement, who claimed Bach for the new decade? In this paper, I argue J.S Bach’s music found a new home in 1980s heavy metal. Bach, as an authority figure of musical complexity became a ‘god’ for some metal musicians, for others a symbol of high culture to draw ideas from, and for one singer (Sebastian Bach) a stage name. Working-class factory-floor values of physical labor, competence, and performative masculinity found their way into metal – a reaction to the widespread valorization and commercialization of musical incompetence in new wave, disco, and punk. This Bachian metal phenomenon flowered in Los Angeles between 1983-1992, especially among musicians affiliated with Shrapnel records – America’s first metal music label. Why Bach?

Although popular music scholars Robert Walser and Gareth Heritage have noted a ‘neo-classical’ aesthetic in 1980s metal, there is currently no work focusing on the prominence of Bach within the genre. This paper, based on my interviews with prominent metal musicians active in the 1980s, primary sources, and secondary literature, will explore why Bach’s music was a key inspiration for these musicians. I argue the technical difficulty in playing Bach’s music on electric guitar fitted well with MTV-ready displays of virtuosity and musicianship; but Bach also complemented metal’s ‘outsider identity’ of being ‘real musicians’ and improvisors in a world of ‘fake’ and automated corporate 1980s pop.

Sunday, 9 October 2022

Session VI: Bach as Authority

Arlan Vriens—In the Image of Bach: Friedrich Wilhelm Rust’s *Sonate a Violino Solo*

In 1795, the Bach family associate Friedrich Wilhelm Rust (1739–1796) composed two pedagogical *Sonate a Violino Solo senza Basso*. Though these works show strong influences from Rust’s late 18th century milieu, their forms are extraordinary for their allusions to J. S. Bach’s iconic *Sei Solo a Violino* (BWV 1001–1006); similarities include polyphonic *Grave-Fuga* and *Adagio-Fuga* pairings, anachronistic dance forms which match those of *Sei Solo*, and even a profound *Ciaccona* in d minor. These parallels are more than coincidental: a skilled violinist, Rust is known to have idolized J. S. Bach, possessed the early Gottschalck (P 968) manuscript of *Sei Solo*, and studied with Friedemann and Emmanuel Bach. Particularly since monophonic violin caprices were already the dominant solo violin genre by Rust’s time, his polyphonic *Sonate* constitute an imaginative early example of Bachiana and are symbolic of Bach’s early authoritative influence over polyphonic solo violin writing. My performance-presentation will use examples from both the *Sonate* and *Sei Solo* to consider the extent to which Rust’s works can illuminate his own unaccompanied violin performance practices as a player with very close links to the Bach family. These practices, in turn, have potential implications for the performance of *Sei Solo* itself, by corroborating or challenging the advice of now-canonic performance treatises by Quantz, Leopold Mozart, and others.

As a secondary focus, I will consider Rust’s *Sonate* as one node in a web of polyphonic solo compositions potentially influenced by Bach around the turn of the 19th century. In combination with evidence of early *Sei Solo* performances by figures like Rust and J.P. Salomon, this body of repertoire does much to undermine the oft-repeated narrative that *Sei Solo* languished in obscurity until 19th-century resurrections by Ferdinand David and Joseph Joachim.

Paul Walker—How Bach’s Fugues acquired their Authority

As is well known, Bach began his exploration of the craft of composition by focusing on fugue, which he pursued by studying the works of the most eminent fuguists of the day, and he similarly taught fugue based on the “real” music that he himself composed. Bach’s contemporary J. J. Fux, on the other hand, based his *Gradus ad Parnassum* on the traditional pedagogical device of species counterpoint leading to fugue and filled it with examples of his own creation. Bach is known to have been dismissive of this, as he saw it, “dry” pedantic approach.

This paper explores the history of and tension between these two ways of understanding and teaching fugue, what we might call the empirical and the prescriptive. At the beginning of the nineteenth the prescriptive approach secured a place in the curriculum of the newly-founded Paris Conservatory, with a model, generally known as the *fugue d’école*, that was widely enough known and respected to have served, for instance, as the basis for both Robert Schumann’s study of fugue in the 1840s (using the text by the Conservatory’s director Luigi Cherubini) and the inaugural entry on fugue in Sir George Grove’s Dictionary of Music in 1879. Over time, however, as Bach’s keyboard and organ works became better and better known, musicians came to prefer the study of his fugues to the reliance on an abstract, theoretical model designed primarily for the teaching of basic compositional principles. Even at the Conservatory itself, the organ professor Charles-Marie Widor taught primarily Bach’s organ works already in the 1890s and complained about the school’s artificial compositional models. The ultimate ascendancy of Bach’s fugues today can succinctly be summed up in the oft-encountered phrase, “Fugue is not a form!”