**Reflections on the works and their interpretation**

**by Kei Koito**

**Avant-propos**

Bach, shortly after his death, had not yet been recognised as the author of Masses, Passions and Cantatas, nor even of the Brandenburg Concertos. Everyone saw him as the prodigious virtuoso organist he was, and admired him for his talent as a concert organist in recitals or at church services, while acknowledging his art of registration and his astonishing pedal technique, among other things.

Unfortunately, most of his written organ music (about 90%, according to musicologist G.B. Stauffer) has been lost, scores scattered, improvisation works vanished. Fortunately, the rest (some 200 works) subsisted, as autographs or copies, thanks to his family, his students, his collaborators or his admirers who considered Bach to be one of the greatest organ composers ever to have existed.

Unlike the vocal works, which were only recognised for their intrinsic value from the 19th century onwards, his organ works were already passed down during his lifetime, and then from generation to generation up to the present day, with no interruption.

The programme of this recording contains free compositions such as Toccata/Preludes & Fugues of various styles, as well as chorales of different forms, comparable to the vocal works, in which the author's inner being is echoed.

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**The CD track numbers are indicated in bold type.**

**1.** The ***Toccata & Fugue in D minor, BWV* 538,** known as "Dorian", was written between 1712 and 1717, between the second Weimar period and the beginning of Köthen, when Bach transcribed different styles of concertos both for organ and keyboard. Like many other composers in Europe at the time, Bach was only to reach his full potential after undergoing the Italian phase (Vivaldi, Torelli, B. and A. Marcello...). Documents attest that this Toccata is the only organ work that Bach himself later performed, for the inauguration of the organ at St. Martin's Church in Kassel on 22 September 1732 (BDok II, 316 & 522).

It was after watching Bach conduct his musicians, probably during the performance of one of his sacred music pieces, that J.M. Gesner, Bach's colleague at the Thomasschule in Leipzig, explained in a very complimentary letter to M.F.Q. Quintilia, in 1738 (BDok II, 432), "[...] all alone, in the midst of the greatest din made by all the participants, and, although he is executing the most difficult parts himself, noticing at once whenever and wherever a mistake occurs, holding everyone together, taking precautions everywhere, and repairing any unsteadiness, full of rhythm in every part of his body - this one man taking in all these harmonies with his keen ear and emitting with this voice alone the tone of all the voices." For Bach, could all this be just a game? It would be interesting to know how Bach the organist mastered his instrument’s most complex polyphonies.

As in the *Toccata in F Major* for organ (BWV 540/1), or the Prelude to the *2nd English Suite*, the ***Dorian Toccata*** opens with two concertante voices in imitation. Although the autograph is lost, an old copy has been handed down to us, with precise indications of manual changes in order to obtain a contrast between Oberwerk and Rückpositive: the opposition between *Tutti/Concerto grosso* and *Soli/Concertino* in a concerto grosso style with a *Ritornello* form – invented among others by Corelli and later Vivaldi. But Bach greatly surpassed the models, expanding the *Concerto grosso* style, adding his dense counterpoint style. Like the *Third Brandenburg*'s first movement, the Toccata's initial motif in perpetual movement projects itself right to the final chord with almost hypnotic insistence. It may be recalled that the *Brandenburg Concertos* were completed just after, in 1721.

Beyond the stylistic influence of the North, of Italian models, of harmonic progressions encountered in Pachelbel (South Germany), Fischer (Central Germany) or even the influence of the French André Raison, Bach fully demonstrates here his desire for mastery of form as well as an impetuous and lyrical élan that surpasses both his immediate precursors and his contemporaries.

The violin-style writing and articulations typical of bowing found in the ***Dorian Toccata*** can give rise to a richness and diversity of touch on the organ, as the musicologist H. Keller stated as early as 1948. Just like the organ, Bach was perfectly familiar - as was Nikolaus Bruhns - with the violin technique that he must have learned at a early age from his father, Johann Ambrosius, who was initially considered a master of string instruments before being recognised as the director of music of the city and the ducal court of Johann Georg I and Johann Georg II of Saxony-Eisenach. In March 1714, did Bach not sign *Concertmeister u. Hofforg.* : Concertmaster and Court Organist? (BDok I, 4).

**2.** Written in *stile* *antico* symbolising the universal ambitions of the High Baroque ruler, the rambling subject of the ***Dorian Fugue*** is built on the main notes of the Toccata melody**.** The *alla breve* pulse (*tactus*), derived from the *Prima prattica*, reflects both the sacred vocal writing of the Renaissance, notably that of Palestrina, and the *Ricercar* figures for keyboard of the Frescobaldi school, passed on to Germany by Froberger, Kerll and Pachelbel among others.

But the episodes are Bach's own invention. Strong motor skills driven by syncopations, suspensions, chromaticisms, transient dissonances, characteristic of the *Spielfuge* (instrumental fugue): all of this creates a concise polyphonic chiaroscuro, surprisingly elaborate, and creates a dazzling architecture. Does his mastery not give way to that of The Art of Fugue?

While Bach's contemporary musicians and those of previous generations had to prove that they also knew how to write in the old style and master the contrapuntal composition technique inherited from the 16th and 17th centuries, no-one worked in this field with as much passion and depth, nor displayed such an almost avant-garde spirit, as Bach did.

Finally, the surprising final four bars create a dialogue on a pedal point comparable to a grandiose sacred work with double choir. How can this not bring to mind the St. Matthew Passion, Masses, Motets and other cantatas?

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The autograph version of the ***18 Leipzig Chorales*** that Bach composed from 1739 until his death is the final revision of a carefully thought-out plan of works composed some thirty years earlier, between 1707 and 1717. One wonders how Bach’s demanding and busy tasks in Leipzig gave him time to return to his earlier works - of which there are also many previous or successive versions - unless we see it as a desire and relentless effort to achieve perfection. Some chorales have been altered in different ways, by lengthening the original text, making substantial thematic, rhythmic or embellishment changes. The chorales are all inspired by the liturgical text, in turn invoking the symbolic sign of the Trinity with the number "3". Thus Bach tried to perfect and renew, through synthesis, the art of chorale music from the 17th to the early 18th century.

The fact that the Leipzig Chorales belong to the collection of the "18" chorales is the subject of diverging opinions, to say the least: indeed, the title of "18 Chorales" was added by the publisher of the Old Bach Edition, insofar as the first fifteen are autographs, the 16th and 17th being the handiwork of Altnikol, Bach's son-in-law, and the 18th of someone unknown, according to G. Dadelsen (1957), later supported by W. Breig (1978) and P. Wollny (1999). On the other hand, H. Klotz argues (NBA, 1958) in favour of the number of "17" chorales, noting the indication "in Organo Pleno" on either side of the Pentecost chorales, while Y. Kobayashi rather defends (1988 and 2000) that of "16", based on the cycle of 21 chorales that Bach had planned - and which he unfortunately was not able to complete, whereas P. Williams is of the opinion (1980-1984) that we are not even certain of the number of chorales that the collection should have contained, nor what the original plan was.

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**3.** "By the rivers of Babylon, we sat down in sorrow...". Deported to Babylon, the Hebrew people longed for their temple in Jerusalem. The chorale ***An Wasserflüssen Babylon*** (*Super flumina Babylonis*, Psalm 137), **BWV 653**, written between 1712 and 1714, is in a slow dance movement, a low-keyed *saraband* set in a *ritornello* form comparable to the chorale *Schmücke dich, o liebe Seele*, BWV 654. Though its construction is that of an ornate chorale, a legacy of Nordic composers such as Jacob Praetorius, Scheidemann, Buxtehude, Böhm or Bruhns, Bach nevertheless adds another element found in the French classical organ repertoire, characteristic of the *Récit de* *Tierce en taille* - a piece played in the tenor *Tertia* - with multiple *agréments* (ornaments). Might we see this as the fruit of Bach's research, who had copied Nicolas de Grigny's *First Organ Book* (1699) with his own hand between 1709 and 1718?

During the appraisal of the organ of St. Blasius's Church in Mühlhausen in 1708 (BDok I, 83), Bach wrote: "*Tertia*, with which by drawing a few other stops, one can produce a fine and complete *Sesquialtera*." We can thus guess how fond he was of the Tertia to obtain the colour of the *Sesquialtera*: would it have been more or less similar to the French "jeu de tierce"?

The two treble and bass voices, similar to the viola da gamba in the "Consort music" style, continuously repeat the two initial phrases of the chorale. The atmosphere of the piece is rather serene, but poignant all the same, with certain parts increasing the impression of affliction by chromaticism and the minor mode. It tells a tale of the pain and nostalgic grief of a human being longing for a "new Jerusalem" (*Revelation* 21).

Thanks to Michael Maul’s and Peter Wollny’s spectacular discovery, we know that Sebastian had already received from his brother Johann Christoph, who had taken in the young orphan, a much more important and comprehensive musical training than we had previously imagined. Indeed, these two musicologists showed that at the age of thirteen/fourteen, when his feet could barely reach the pedalboard, the young boy had copied in his own hand Johann Adam Reinken's *Fantasy* on the chorale *An Wasserflüssen Babylon* (*On the Waters of Babylon*)*.* It was therefore from a very young age that Sebastian began his apprenticeship, copying models he enthusiastically seized upon, and then enhancing them with his own genius.

As for the chorale, the legendary (but very real) meeting with Reinken in Hamburg in 1720 is often mentioned; the old master is said to have congratulated Bach warmly for his wonderful improvisation on the same theme. It is also said that twenty years later, Bach, in revising the earlier version of BWV 653a, wished to pay tribute to Reinken by adding to the coda of this final version a descending scale in the tenor solo, in the manner of the great Hamburg Master.

That said, although Sebastian had transcribed some keyboard works from Reinken's *Hortus Musicus* (as per fugue BWV 954 and sonatas 965 and 966), it should be noted that Bach's keyboard writing was only influenced by Reinken to a very limited or almost non-existent extent. As mentioned by D. Schulenberg, it is not impossible that Bach even consciously tried to distance himself from Reinken's style. Bach's writing aims for a completely different direction, in this chorale as well.

**4.** The **Trio in G Major BWV deest is** found in a Parisian manuscript from the private library of Theodor Hahn, a student of Carl Friedrich Zelter (1758-1832). It belongs to five virtuoso chorales in trio form in Bach’s name, discovered and published in 2008 (NBA) by musicologist Reimar Emans.

Among these trios, ***Was Gott tut, das ist wohlgetan*** (*What God does, is with reason done*) is in a 6/8 time signature. With its two *dessus* (trebles) on two keyboards supported by a pedal bass, its virtuoso style is similar to the trio chorale *Herr Jesus Christ, dich zu uns wend* (BWV 655), as well as the six *Trio Sonatas* (BWV 525-530).

The exultant motif due to the pitch of the chorale develops throughout the piece in numerous imitations right to the final *stretto.* From G major, the piece modulates successively in D major, then in A minor and in B minor. It is only when the original key signature returns that the first phrase of the hymn enters the bass. As in the trio chorales *Herr Jesus Christ, dich zu uns wend*, BWV 655, or *Allein Gott in der Höh' sei Ehr',* BWV 664, of the *Leipzig Chorales*, the theme enters in long notes, similarly to Buxtehude, Pachelbel, Buttsedt or Kauffmann.

The authenticity of this beautiful Trio has not yet been confirmed (BWV deest). It is plausible that an admirer may have transcribed it for organ from a lost cantata piece by Bach. If we follow this assumption, the same could apply to the *Trio in G minor*, BWV 584 (track 11). Bach in fact also used this same chorale several times in different Cantatas, BWV 10, 12, 69a, 75, 98, 99, 99, 100 and 144.

**5.** The ***Prelude*** of the ***Prelude & Fugue in G minor, BWV* 535,** is a completely rewritten version of Prelude BWV 535a, which dates back to 1702. The changes from Dorian notation with only one flat to modern notation with two flats suggest that this revision was carried out after 1717, i.e. during Bach’s second Weimar period when he was about to accept the position of Kapellmeister offered by Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Köthen.

It is interesting to note that at that time, Bach had already composed twenty-eight cantatas and would soon create, around 1720, the Sonatas and Partitas for Violin solo (BWV 1001 to 1006), the Suites for Cello solo (BWV 1007 to 1012) and the Sonatas for violin and obligato keyboard (BWV 1014 to 1019) where he particularly sought the three-dimensional stereophonic effect and the implicit polyphony of these instruments, by producing a kind of hidden polyphonic illusion, notably through the use of typically organ grammar. On the organ, on the other hand, Bach made more use of the idiom and articulation of string instruments than before.

Apparently, Bach wanted to keep the same three-part writing as in BWV 535a (track 10), though expanding and transforming each of the three parts with several new ideas. The two Preludes - both the original and its revised version - have kept the characters of *passaggio* manualiter, a *trillo longo* and a pedal *solo.*

The concept of *passaggio* refers to a way of playing solo passages that was developed in Italy, allowing a figurative gesture to be interpreted with great liberty, particularly with rubato, articulation silence and *Sprezzatura* (Caccini, *Le nuove musiche*, 1601/02). These subtle changes in tempo are the result of 17th century vocal art applied to keyboard music (by Frescobaldi, Froberger and Nordic composers, among others). Bach used this concept in 1707/1708, for instance in Cantata 131/2 *Aus der Tiefen rufe ich, Herr* and in the *Suite in E minor* for lute (BWV 996/1) dated 1712, as well as in several stylus phantasticus works for keyboard and organ composed between 1699 and 1708. The same pattern can be found in three other works on this CD (BWV 532, 550 and 720: tracks 17, 8 and 16).

The ***Prelude*** opens with a cello solo composition style, leading to a *passaggio* whose central section offers chromaticism and enharmonics in progression, before concluding with a rigorous counterpoint. It is a page of beautiful manualiter virtuosity, full of surprises, in *stylus phantasticus*.

**6.** The theme of the ***Fugue*** is closely related to that of the Prelude. Furthemore, the *trillo longo of the* fourth bar is reminiscent of the finale of Cantata 21 *Ich hatte viel Bekümmernis*. This whole fugue develops in a very personal and striking way, ending with a five-voice theatrical peroration. As pointed out by Philipp Spitta, each entry of the subject, by progressive accumulation, is "new and of increasing vivacity". Immediately after a powerful interjection, the simultaneous emergence of lyricism and vibrant energy leads to a brilliant conclusion.

**7.** The chorale ***Nun danket alle Gott*, BWV 657**, uses J. Crüger’s melody (1647) and M. Rinkart’s text (1648), *Mit Herzen, Mund und Händen... (Let everyone now thank God, With heart, voice and hands...*). Bach revised it between 1739 and 1742, but it is the only chorale in the Leipzig collection that does not enable us to trace the evolution of the writing, the original, probably composed before the first Weimar period, having being lost.

Each section of the chorale is preceded by a short introduction where the voices anticipate the theme of the chorale in long values in the soprano. Written in motet form, the style of the piece comes from the North and Central German school.

It starts with repeated notes imitating bells ringing - as if arousing people’s courage -, followed by a *stretto* diminution of the beginning of the initial hymn melody; as pointed out by J. Chailley, "in a practically dancing dactylic rhythm, matching the clapping of hands of popular joy", this festive chorale is intended either for weddings, - as *Trauungs-Chorale* BWV 252, - or for the Reformation era in Leipzig where it can be found in Cantatas BWV 79 and 192.

Bach composed two chorales on the organ for the Reformation period. *Ein feste Burg* BWV 720 (track 16) expresses the absolute will to overcome the darkness and despair from which the people had suffered during the Thirty Years' War, while ***Nun danket....*** rather reflects an expression of hope and praise that reaches to the very depths of the soul.

The choice of registration was inspired, inter alia, by N. Harnoncourt's recording of Cantata 192, ***Nun danket alle Gott***, relatively similar to the style of this chorale: two reeds on the left hand and a trumpet on the pedal, in the style of the 17th century Nordic organ *Consort music*. It is indeed a registration recommended for this type of writing by J.F. Agricola, a remarkable student of Bach’s during the Leipzig period.

The whole piece attests to a highly developed counterpoint that is in fact for three instrumentalists. On the organ, the left hand and pedal form a rich fugato accompaniment, while the right hand sings in the soprano with an augmentation of the cantus firmus. We can see that the young Bach’s writing skills already surpassed the model of all his predecessors.

**8.** Like the Prelude of the *Prelude & Fugue in A minor BWV* 543a, the ***Prelude*** of the ***Prelude & Fugue in G major, BWV* 550,** is thought to have been written between 1706 and 1708, around the time of Cantatas 4, 106 and 131, just after Bach's experience as a violinist (or violist) in Weimar in 1703, and upon his return from Lübeck, where he went to listen to Buxtehude (1706). Before becoming organist and Concertmaster of the Weimar Court Chapel in 1708, Bach had met J.P. Westhoff (1656-1705), known as a virtuoso violinist and author of solo violin works. It is assumed that this made Bach very keen to study the art of playing the violin and composing like Westhoff, who was leading a successful career. Numerous documents bear witness to Bach's insatiable thirst for learning from his contemporaries, as well as his relentless dedication to perfecting himself right up to his mature years.

The fact that the pedal part of the Prelude goes up to top E attests that Bach must have known the organ of the Michaeliskirche in Buttstadt in the Duchy of Weimar, an instrument built in 1701, or that of the castle of Weißenfels, dated 1668/73, as the pedals of both these two instruments reach top F.

The improvisation style here is reminiscent of Buxtehude or Bruhns. The initial four-note cell and the tirelessly repeated rhythms throughout the piece are as skillfully written and as dynamic as the fugue.

A bridge (Grave) in the style of the *Goûts réunis* connects the Prelude to the Fugue. In just three bars, Bach combines France and Italy and offers remarkable majestic orchestral writing in the style of Lully on the one hand, *Durezza e Ligatura on the* other hand, mainly stemming from the Frescobaldi school via Froberger, but also from the Corelli school.

Sebastian was inspired by all kinds of European music, in Ohdruf (1696-1700) already, with his brother Johann Christoph, main editor of the *Möller Manuscript* and *Andreas Bach Buch* (R. Hill, 1987). It was at this time that he encountered French music such as opera transcriptions like the chaconne from Lully’s *Phaéton* (SPK, Ms 40644, Berlin) and Marin Marais’ *Alcide* (MB, III 8/4, Leipzig), as well as keyboard pieces by D'Anglebert, Lebègue and Marchand and composers from North and Central Germany and Italy. This was well before going to study in Lüneburg, immersing himself in French music at the Duke of Lüneburg's castle, going to the court of Celle, visiting the Hamburg Opera (1700-1703), later following Buxtehude’s *Abendmusiken* to Lübeck (1705/6), and even before copying Dupart, Boyvin, Grigny (1709-1712) and Frescobaldi (1714).

**9.** The ***Fugue***, cheerfully gay and communicative, is based on the *Concerto da Camera* style, a genre illustrated by Corelli. It may be recalled that in his preface to the *Armonico tributo* (1682) about the Roman style, Georg Muffat considers the possibility of adapting an orchestral version to smaller ensembles, a trio for instance, thus allowing the *Concertino* parts to be played with two violins and the basso continuo only, to achieve what he calls a *Perfetto Concerto*.

By repeating a broken chord in string instrument manner, this **Fugue** in *Spielfuge*'s style - the indication *alla breve e staccato* was added by a copyist - has long been deemed monotonous, yet it is absolutely the opposite. The divertimenti, richly imaginative and built on a single subject for the sake of unity, follow one another perfectly, as does their progression, remarkably conducted in a single flight, just like the Prelude. The conclusion, culmination point of this long fugue, is rather unexpected: does the whirling sequence between bars 202 to 210, adding a festive dimension, not particularly resemble that which Scheidemann proposes in the last eight bars of the *Canzon in F major*, WV44, or the surprising English virginalists?

Composers of Bach's time had the Suites at their disposal to learn how to handle different rhythms, a wide variety of tempos, measures and pulsations in order to give each dance its own character and movement. Bach achieved such a high degree of skill in this field that he succeeded in giving his fugues an irresistible dance rhythm, despite the complexity of their transcription for keyboard. Despite a binary key signature, isn't this fugue indeed somewhat dancing?

The subject of this fugue is built in the style of a *Canzona,* or under the influence of the transformation technique of the *Ricercare.* Starting on the main notes from D, the fifth on the G major tonic chord descends by the major or minor third interval respectively: D, B, G, E, then E, C, A, F sharp, which generate a rather phenomenal descent before returning to G, the fundamental note. That is, D, B, G, E, C, D, A and finally F sharp for the diatonic G major cadenza. This fall in thirds on the modal scale reminds us of Zarlino, as well as of Frescobaldi’s research in his famous *Recercar Ottavo*, *obligo di non uscir mai digrado* (1615), in other words never progressing by adjacent notes, but strictly by intervals of thirds, fourths, and so on - but also, surprisingly and closer to us, to the American minimalists. This Fugue BWV 550 is thus rigorously and ingeniously built right to the end of the piece. If we are to remember that Bach only copied Frescobaldi's *Fiori Musicali* in 1714, in other words well after having composed this fugue, this suggests that he may have been acquainted with other Frescobaldi pieces before then.

Furthermore, around 1709/10, before studying Vivaldi, Bach copied Telemann's *Concerto for 2 violins, strings and basso continuo* in G major (TWV 52, G2), written around 1708/09, as well as Albinoni's *Concerto a 5* in E minor, Opus 2 No. 2. And in 1709, he met Pisendel for the first time, famous violinist and Vivaldi’s student. Finally, there are also some typically Corelli rhythms in this fugue, particularly those of Sonata op. 4 n°4, from 1694. Might it have been composed around 1709/10?

According to the improvisation techniques used in the 17th and early 18th centuries, the performer had taken the liberty of adding certain ornaments, diminutions, passing notes, etc., especially in sequences with perfect and broken chords.

**10.** The manuscript of the ***Prelude & Fugue in G minor, BWV*** 535a, is found in Möller's manuscript (Mö 23), mostly written by Johann Christoph, Sebastian's brother. The work most certainly dates from before 1704. This is corroborated by the soprano clef notation and the one and only flat in the Dorian mode key signature. It is probably contemporaneous with the *Capriccio in B flat major* BWV 992 for keyboard *(Capriccio sopra la lontananza del suo fratello dilettissimo)*, according to the writing technique.

After his accession to St. Michael’s Church and his studies with Böhm in Lüneburg, Sebastian apparently applied for two vacant organist positions, Sangerhausen in 1702 and Arnstadt in 1703, according to R. Stinson's conjecture. It may be that the ***Prelude*, BWV 535a/1 was** specially conceived for Sangerhausen, in order to impress the jury with the *Sturm und Drang* effect of the piece, while taking full advantage of the richness of the St James Church instrument and its various types of reeds that must have appealed to the young candidate: Zincken, Dulcian, Regal on the manuals, Posaune 16' and Cornet 2' on the pedals. Despite the enthusiasm of the listeners, the position was not awarded to Bach but to a competitor, following an intercession by the Duke of Weißenfels.

This *Prelude*, also called *Passagio*, is in three parts and its duration is relatively short, as is customary in Central and Southern Germany. Compared with the Prelude of the revised version, BWV 535/1 (track 5), its writing style is still that of a novice. Yet Bach shows ingenuity by applying a whole polyphonic world for keyboard as well as voices to the specific writing of monodic instruments (violin, viola, and cello probably). In his search for "his own language", one already detects in this miniature piece a kind of germination that was to produce, eighteen years later, the imposing *Sonatas and Partitas for solo violin*, and the *Cello* *Suites*.

But we also know that he applied himself throughout his life - and with such accomplishment - to transcribing the idiom of monodic instruments to keyboard and voice. Indeed, these reciprocal actions gave Bach's writing its profound originality.

In *J.S. Bach, The Learned Musician* (New York 2001), Christoph Wolff refers to the works of this period as a "self-conscious search for artistic identity on the part of young and ambitious keyboard virtuoso, who probably never saw himself as an apprentice and now tried to place himself in the company of other masters."

Sebastian**,** who had just turned eighteen, was this time successfully appointed, on August 9, 1703, organist of the Neue Kirche in Arnstadt. He was to hold this position for almost four years. Could we assume that the Fragmentary Fugue BWV 535a/2 had been written on this occasion? The organ has two manuals and pedal. The Oberwerk and Brustwerk include several 8’ of various colours: Principal, Viola di Gamba, Quintadehna, Grobgedacktes, Stillgedacktes, Gemshorn.

The structure of this fugue is already remarkable, despite a still uncertain writing style and incomplete peroration. Hence the preference for the final version **BWV 535/2** (track 6), developed fifteen years later, an undeniable masterpiece among all of Bach's fugues.

**11.** On May 7, 1724, Bach composed, in Leipzig, the Cantata ***Wo gehest du hin?****,* BWV 166, on the text of an anonymous poet, featuring a sublime tenor aria (166/2) interacting with an oboe, symbol of the celestial element, and a violin, symbol of the human being on Earth: *"****Ich will an den Himmel denken****... Mensch, ach Mensch, wo gehst du hin?"* ("All my thoughts to Heav'n are turning... Man, ah man!... Where goest thou, ah where?")*.*

The ***Organ Trio*, BWV 584**, like the slow movements of the Organ Trio Sonatas, BWV 525-530, offers imitative dialogues of rare beauty and Corelli-like ingenuity. This organ arrangement, with no tenor voice (published in the journal *Der Orgel-Freund*, Erfurt/Leipzig, 1842), is probably by Bach himself or a member of his circle who remained anonymous. It is thanks to the reconstruction carried out by A. Dürr (1918-2011), who completed the lost violin part based on this edition, that the Cantata 166/2 could be completely reconstituted.

**12.** Composed between 1709 and 1717, the first part of ***Komm, Gott, Schöpfer, Heiliger Geist*, BWV 667**, in the form of a chorale Partita (variation) is identical, except for a few details, to that of the eponymous *Orgelbüchlein* chorale (BWV 631). The melody and text by Luther are none other than the adaptation of the *Veni Creator Spiritus*.

In the tradition of Scheidt, and later that of J.G. Walther, the cantus firmus of this chorale first appears in the soprano and is developed in a very rhythmic way in dance pulsation (12/8): the accompaniment is incorporated into the *figura corta* in anapest on the viola and tenor, superimposed on the *syncope consonans desolato* on the pedal, giving an extraordinary accent and lever effect. The whole symbolizes the *vivificans spiritus* (U. Meyer, 1972), in accordance with the text: "Komm, Gott, Schöpfer, Heiliger Geist, Besuch das Herz der Menschen dein... " (*Come, God Creator, Holy Spirit, inspire the hearts of your people...*) 667.

The second part immediately follows the first. According to G. von Dadelsen (1988), this second part was probably added by Bach around 1746/47, and copied around 1750, after Bach's death, possibly by J. Ch. Altnikol, Bach's disciple and son-in-law, or by Dorothea, Bach's daughter and Altnikol's wife - unless it was another copyist, "Anonymous Vr", according to A. Dürr (1957), probably from the circle of J. Ph. Kirnberger (1721-1783), who had worked extensively for Bach between 1742 and 1750.

The Cantus firmus in the bass in long note values is accompanied by a sixteenth-note pattern that spreads all over in imitative figures expressing, *organo pleno*, the amazing energy of the "tongues of fire" of Pentecost. The performer had the privilege of making this hymn sound on the pedalboard with the rare "Prestant 32'” of the Martinikerk organ in Groningen, built in 1691/92 by A. Schnitger. This set is the only remaining example out of all the historical organs of the Baroque period. In his report on the Mühlhausen organ in 1708 (BDok I, 83), Bach observes that the 32' pedal stop, in this case a *bourdon (*subbass), "… gives the whole organ the most solid gravity".

The melody of the chorale is in G-mixolydian mode. At the end of the cadenza, which is rather diatonic, Bach signs his name: "B" and "A" in the tenor, "C" and "H" in the alto (B flat, A, C and B natural, according to German notation), while inserting a sixth voice within a spectacular hemiola. The conclusion is on a diminished seventh chord on a pedal point on the G, with a resolution on a Picardy third.

**13.** Composed between 1713 and 1716, the *Jesu, meine Freude*, BWV 610, chorale, from the *Orgelbüchlein*, was intended for the Christmas period and treated as an Advent chorale. The chorale on the eponymous Motet (BWV 227) was composed before 1735 and holds the function of funeral music. But the composition date and liturgical destination of the ***Fantasia super: Jesu, meine Freude*, BWV 713,** are uncertain.

The term *Fantasia* here means that along the way, the chorale structure changes. First section for 3 voices: the cantus firmus is in long note values, the accompaniment of the other two voices is frugal, and the dactyl rhythm conveys infinitely delicate joy. Not a single note is lacking, and not a single one is superfluous. The *Ritornello* accompaniment is inserted between the melodic lines of the chorale, passing from one voice to another. Each entry conveys new emotions from the text: "Jesu, meine Freude, meines Herzens Weide..." (*Jesu, my joy, pastrue of my heart...*).

This piece of great beauty is reminiscent of the climate of quivering sensitivity of Buxtehude's *Magnificat noni toni* (BuxWV 205/2), and above all, Bach’s *Magnificat* (BWV 243/11) and the Cantatas BWV 10/12 and BWV 12/6. Indeed in the latter, the melody of the chorale, written without words, can be heard on the *Tromba da tirarsi.*

The relatively dense counterpoint, particularly due to certain crossovers of voices, has caused Ph. Spitta to say of this ***Fantasia*** that it is an "exquisite labyrinth". According to certain performance traditions in northern Germany in the 17th century, despite the *manualiter* indication - which may not be Bach's, the original being lost - and if the organ allows it, the cantus firmus, alternately in soprano, viola and then tenor, etc., can be played on the pedal.

The previous version BWV 713a provides us with a guide for choosing an instrument. Written in D minor, it could be an adaptation of BWV 713, which is in E. Though some doubt remains, it is however certain that BWV 713a was written for an organ of a rather unequal temperament, even close to mesotonic, to avoid certain problems that can arise in the key of E. Fortunately, the Neidhardt temperament of the Martinikerk organ is particularly well suited to the version in E in Phrygian mode, as noted by M. Lindley (*Tuning and Intonation,* 1990).

The pedal part of BWV 713a does not give any indication of registration pitch, yet the cantus firmus has to migrate over different voices. If BWV 713a really is Bach's, it may be that Bach (or the copyist) had forgotten to write down obvious indications for performance on the organ - indications that Bach occasionally omitted in orchestral scores. It can be assumed that he would give these indications directly to the musicians at rehearsals. If this conjecture should turn out to be correct, wouldn't there be a chance that Bach himself performed the ***Fantasia***?

With the AAB cantus firmus (Barform: *Aufgesang/2 Stollen* and *Abgesang*) dating back to the Minnesinger era, often used in Lutheran chorales, Bach gave great and surprising contrapuntal intensity to the generally rather discreet accompaniment voices, in order to ensure the balance of the extremes. Two antagonistic poles seem to merge. It is precisely this divine art that moves us.

The short second part forms a contrast, with a free paraphrase in ternary meter (3/8). The passages in parallel thirds and sixths appear to represent both the union with Christ and the Lamb of God, which is also the case in Cantatas 13 and 161 and chorales 618, 624, 633 and 634, which evoke a "Gottes Lamm mein Bräutigam" ("Lamb of God my bridegroom"). For this second part *(Abgesang),* the BWV 713 version (manualiter) was chosen, with a sweet sound, a melancholic colour able to convey heavenly gentleness (the score indicates "dolce"). A brief rhythmic cadence concludes the piece.

One final remark. The key signatures of the six *English Suites*, BWV 806-811,(A, A, G, F, E, D) precisely make up the first melodic phrase of the *Jesu, meine Freude* chorale. Coincidence, allusion or implicit reference? The question remains....

**14.** Theinitial chorus of the *Passion according to St Matthew*, "Kommt, ihr Töchter, helft mir Klagen..." ("Come, you daughters, help me lament..."), Picander's poem from the *Song* *of Songs*, has the first verse of the chorale *O Lamm Gottes, unschuldig* ("O guiltless Lamb of God") in the soprano, on a text by Nicolaus Decius' *Agnus Dei* (1480-1546) and an eponymous Gregorian melody.

Composed in three iterated Agnus Dei verses in accordance with liturgical use, Bach uses a unique, one-piece partita form for the chorale ***O Lamm Gottes, unschuldig*, BWV 656.** The idea, clearly amplified, based on Böhm's model, with different interpretations of the same cantus firmus melody: successively in the soprano (the Father), the alto (the Son) and the bass (the Holy Spirit) to symbolize the Trinity. The melody is submitted with three and then four voices. Inner tension gradually increases and draws a single path from beginning to end, in a single breath.

Verses 1 and 2 are written in the Central German style. Having mentioned Böhm's proven influence on the young Bach, it is also interesting to observe the fruit of the mutual stimulation and influence between J. G. Walther and Bach, around 1708, in particular by comparing both contemporary compositions, Walther's *Allein Gott* chorale, and his young cousin's BWV 656.

Verse 3 is divided into three segments. First segment, the majestic appearance of God on the pedal is followed by the second segment, the struggle of Christ, conveyed by a ternary motif in the form of a fugal jig. These two segments are made up of the pattern of the cross**.** At theend of the second segment, a curved musical commentary conveys the text "All' Sünd' hast du getragen" ("All sin have you borne"), leading into an extremely intense and sorrowful chromatic spiral, including the descending line *(passus duriusculus)* ending on a bass in C sharp to express"....sonst müssten wir verzagen" ("otherwise we should have despaired").

It is very striking that Bach’s interest here is in one word alone, "Verzagen" ("despaired"), leading him to seek out a specific musical *Affekt.* For J.-Cl. Zehnder (2009), this is what characterizes the young Bach's skill, compared with later works that take the entirety of a text much more into account.

After a few bars of a striking chromatic passage, it is through a sudden and unexpected transmutation that the third segment, diatonic, the liberator "Gib uns den Frieden" ("Give us the peace") arrives, replacing the "Erbarm dich unser" ("Have mercy on us") of the first and second verses. For the listener, the whole Universe is opening up.

In order to symbolize this last segment, instead of the serene atmosphere found, for example, in *Jesu meine Freude*, BWV 713, (track 13), I took the liberty of performing *O Lamm Gottes*, BWV 656, in *tutti on* the organ, thinking of the *Dona nobis pacem*, the final piece of the *Mass in B minor,* BWV 232, involving the choir and the whole orchestra, including three trumpets and timpani, and thinking also of the *Alla breve* for organ, BWV 589, composed much earlier, between 1703 and 1707. The subjects of these two works also come from Corelli (op.6, n°1/3).

The theme "Lamm Gottes" ("Lamb of God") was extremely important for the Lutheran Church in Germany at the time. One of the indisputable proofs thereof is the illustration entitled *Theatrum Instrumentorum* ofthe *Syntagma Musicum* (volume II, 1619) by Michael Praetorius: at the foot of the Lamb of God in the centre of the upper part of this engraving, we read "Ecce Agnus Dei", and below "Apoc", just before "In monte Sion" - "Apoc" for the Lamb of the "Apocalypsis Ioannis".

In the text of the final chorus of Cantata 21, *Ich hatte viel Bekümmernis*, John sees "a multitude of angels saying with a loud voice: the lamb that was sacrificed is worthy to have all mights, riches, wisdom, power, honor, glory and praise" (*Revelation*, 5, 12). This last section ends in a coda "with a strong voice". In addition, it should be recalled that the first four notes of the melody of the first verse of the *O Lamm Gottes* chorale, BWV 656, include at the same time the first four notes of the *Allein Gott* chorale, corresponding to the "Gloria in excelsis Deo".

Symbolism is constantly present in art, digital symbolism included. The sacred or esoteric number and its secret and mysterious meanings come mainly from Pythagorean, biblical, Kabbalistic and Rosicrucian speculations. In its digital form, the name Bach appears in many of his works. BACH: B + A + C + H = 2 + 1 + 3 + 8 = 14. In this regard, it should be noted that verse 3 of the BWV 656 Chorale begins at bar 104 and its third segment begins at bar 140. And that the 141st bar (superimposition of 14 and 41) corresponds precisely to the word "Frieden" which is one of the most important words of the text of the hymn. Furthermore, the piece ends on bar 152 (1 + 5 + 2 = 8). Now 8 is both the symbol of the resurrection and the representation of eternity, the line of drawing of this figure being infinite. Could this be the "eternal peace" to which Bach would have aspired?

Inserted into the Lepizig Chorales, the revised version of the *O Lamm Gottes, unschuldig* chorale offers few changes compared with the one composed around 1708. One can but admire the visionary and monumental conception of such a piece by a 23-year-old composer!

**15.** Bach must have loved the melody of the chorale ***Herzlich thut mich verlangen nach einem sel'gen End,* BWV 727** *("From my heart I long for a blessed end")* so much that he inserted it many times in cantatas, in the *Weihnachtsoratorium* (*Christmas Oratorio)*, BWV 248, as well as in the *Matthäuspassion (Passion according to Saint Matthew)* where, under different texts and harmonisations, it is found no less than five times, symbolising the figure of the cross. This most "sacred" melody is probably derived from a love song, *Mein G'mut ist mir verwirret (My heart is troubled)*, by Hans Leo Haßler (1530-1591), a prolific Renaissance composer.

This most movingly beautiful chorale is, together with the chorales *O Mensch, bewein...*, BWV 622, or *ich ruf zu dir...*, BWV 639, from the *Orgelbüchlein*, one of the most famous from Bach's organ repertoire: the 4-voice harmonisation is simple, following the model of composers from North and Central Germany, but extremely sensitive. Bach very carefully applied various closely intertwined rhetorical figures to the *coloratura* melody, as he was to instruct Johann Gotthilf Ziegler, one of his students, to interpret the chorales "not simply indifferently but according to the Affekt of the words" (BDok II, 423). The use of the affects of each word in the text of this chorale can be found in W.G. Printz's *Musica Modulatoria Vocalis (*Schweindnitz, 1678). It perfectly conveys the effusions (or *Empfinsamkeit*) that go with the "eternal joys"... The bass of the second part of the chorale, based on the text "Ich hab Lust abzuscheiden" ("I have a desire to be separated") corresponds to a slow Pavane pulsation.

Some diminutions are added in Haßler style, or directly inspired by the patterns of the flute voices of the final chorale (on the same theme) of Cantata BWV 161/6, *Komm, du süße Todesstunde*, precisely on the text of "Mit Trübsal und Elend" ("by trouble and misery").

**16.** Well-known because of Cantata BWV 80, the chorale ***Ein feste Burg...* BWV 720** takes the form of a *Fantasia* here, alternating between 2, 3 and 4 voices, paraphrasing and commenting Luther's text (1528): "Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott, ein guter Wehr und Waffen..." (*A firm stronghold is our God, a good bulwork and weapon...*). Of all Bach's organ works, this is the only example of an "embellished cantus firmus" that migrates through the different voices.

This choir, with its figurative descriptions, of rare impetus and resolve, evoking the attacks of the "old demonic enemy" ("der alte böse Feind") in an ebb and flow movement, aims to depict the divine fortress that the people truly needed in the aftermath of the Thirty Years' War. These anapest motifs for which Bach had a strong predilection are also present here.

It is likely that this fantasy was played by Bach, or by another organist, at the inauguration of the newly revised and enlarged 3-manual and pedalboard organ of the Mühlhausen Divi-Blasii-Kirche of which Bach was the expert, for the 1708 Reformation Day.

A manuscript by J. G. Walther has kept a trace of the registration that Bach had scrupulously noted: Fagott 16' on the left hand and Sesquialtera on the right hand. Concerning the Fagott 16' - installed at Bach's request instead of the 8' Trumpet - Bach specified (BDok, I, 83) that "a Faggotto of 16-foot tone will be installed, which is useful for all kinds of new ideas and sounds very fine in concerted music". By examining, among other things, the rhythms, the relatively linear texture and the movements of the parallel passages, it seems plausible that this piece was composed before 1708, rather in the manner of Buxtehude, Bruhns or Johann Nikolaus Hanff.

**17.** Bach wrote the ***Prelude*** of the ***Prelude & Fugue in D major, BWV* 532, -** also called *Concertato or Pièce d’orgue* *-* between 1708 and 1712*,* at the same time as the *Toccata* *in D major* for keyboard, BWV 912, also made up of several parts. The first section of the ***Prelude***, itself subdivided into three parts, opens with an ascending scale on the pedal that returns three times, accompanied by passages in the style of an Italian concerto and a Nordic toccata. Then a *fermata* supports a solemn dotted rhythm in the French style, leading, *en* *fusée* and with diminution, to the return of the ascending scale in the main key signature. All this is remarkably well constructed in keeping with the art of public speaking inherited from antiquity.

The second section, marked *alla breve*, is part of an orchestral texture in the style of Corelli, in particular that of the *Sonata a tre* (Op. 3, No. 4/4) and even more so of the Op. 6 *Concerto grosso*, also shown by the modulations in minor and sharp key signatures, indeed similar to those of the above-mentioned *Toccata in D major*, BWV 912. The same figurative pattern inspired by Corelli in this ***Prelude***, BWV 532/1, can also be found in Handel's keyboard suite (HWV 43/2) - though later on (between 1717 and 1719) - in the fifth *Concerto grosso in D major/ minor* (HWV 316/2) and in the Symphony (introduction) of *Anthem II* (HWV 247/1), composed between 1718 and 1729 on the text of Psalm 11.

Indeed, Corelli made certain stereotypical rhythms popular, in particular harmonic progressions on a bass and passages with offbeats and syncopations that came from dance music widespread around 1680 in Italy, and which were often present in the many fast and binary movements of his sonatas *da chiesa* or *da camera*. Though he only left us one organ fugue (BWV 579) on a theme by Corelli (op. 3, n°4/2, 1689), Bach must have been acquainted with a number of works by this composer, whose trio writing, for instance, was a reference and model for all of Europe from the end of the 17th century onwards, through his students, such as Geminiani and Locatelli, as well as through Reincken, Buxtehude, Pachelbel, Purcell, Alessandro Scarlatti, Fux, Dandrieu, François Couperin and Vivaldi, to Bach, Handel and Telemann.

In this *alla breve*, the performer took the liberty of playing a few bars on the bass (bars 45 to 47 and 81 to 83) on the manual keyboard, without necessarily having to play the bass on the pedal, in other words in the spirit of the *Concertino*.

In the last section of the Prelude, a great ascending line of a *fusée* motif on the manual once again attests to the very French Louis XIV taste with which the young Bach had become familiar at an early age, first at the newly built Lüneburg castle, Duke Georg Wilhelm’s second residence to which the students of the Michaelisschule had access, in particular to attend productions by the Ritter-Akademie, directed by Thomas de la Selle, dance master and student of Lully’s. Thereafter he complemented his knowledge of French keyboard music with Böhm. According to Karl Geiringer, Sebastian was able to visit, as instrumentalist, the small Francophile court of Celle, known as the "miniature of Versailles", between Hamburg and Hanover, as well as the Hamburg Opera where Böhm was harpsichordist/continuo player, and where Johann Sigismund Kusser (1660-1727), a student of Lully's, was active. Kusser represented the French style there between 1694 and 1696, but many Italian operas, containing *secco* and *accompanied* recitatives, were also performed there.

Regarding this, Carl Philipp Emanuel at first claimed that his father had no particular interest in opera. But, later, he reported that the latter had great respect for Reinhard Keiser (1674-1739), director of the Hamburg Opera, who succeeded Kusser in 1702, though Bach never met him personally (BDk III, 803). It thus seems obvious that Bach was not at all insensitive to opera music. Might he not have been particularly enthused by the style of the "Overtures"?

Here, Bach also draws inspiration from the *concertato-choral* form, reinforced by the sumptuous double pedal of the North German masters' tradition, as implemented by Weckmann, Tunder and Bruhns. The French, Italian and German national styles definitely offered Bach their best, styles that he blended into astonishing unity. Albert Schweitzer was one of the greatest admirers of this last section, which he described as "wonderful pathos".

The choices made by the young Bach were incredibly cosmopolitan: his passion for the *Goûts Réunis*, which guided him towards experimenting with every possible style, led him to care about the quality of his discourse. He permanently tried to find new hybrid solutions by bringing together within the same work their fusion into a coherent organic whole. There lies the heart of his musical genius.

**18.** In the *Göttingen Bach-Katalog* (J.S. Bach-Institut, Göttingen, 2008), there are references to seventeen manuscripts from BWV 532, eleven of which contain only the fugue. Composed between 1706 and 1712 approximately, this ***Fugue*** is a kind of banter in *Spielfuge* (instrumental fugue). Developing at first in a chatty atmosphere, both light and even carefree, it forms a clear contrast with the density and severity of the Prelude. The subject, which is but the multiplication of the *Grupetto* of the counter-subject, is part of a repetitive pattern, by anaphora, in a descending circular movement, concluding with a trill. The banter side is also depicted by echoing effects. These same elements can also be found in Vivaldi's Violin Concerto in D major, known as "Grosso Mogul" (RV 208a/3), which Bach was soon to transcribe (1713/14) for the organ.

This fugue is very carefully constructed, in the tradition of the Old School (Pachelbel, Reincken, Buxtehude...). Instead of wandering aimlessly, it is balanced by means of a powerful harmonic support that Bach integrated into a homophonic *continuo* in the Italian concerto style, whilst conducting his own contrapuntal technique.

As with the ***Fugue in G Major***, BWV 550/2 (track 9), this fugue is one continuous piece, concluding with a brilliant and very virtuoso pedal solo. The sixteenth-note pattern produces a constant pattering effect, a kind of *perpetuum mobile* with a youthful tone, and a great propelling force.

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**Postface**

All my gratitude goes to the publisher, as well as to those who helped me make this recording. Frequenting Bach's predecessors and contemporaries influenced my approach to Bach somewhat - or sometimes even very much. The remarkable creative evolution of his work, particularly the period between Lüneburg (1700-1703) and Weimar II (1709-1717), is endlessly fascinating to me.

This programme is composed above all of works that I have admired for a very long time, which simultaneously make me question myself. However, for this recording, the interpreter had to decide between different execution options. This is also due to the special quality of the instrument chosen. The Schnitger organ of the Martinikerk in Groningen is characterised by clear timbre and a fabulous colour of every stop, by the depth of the foundation stops, brilliant mixtures, a powerful and totally independent pedal. I discovered this unique instrument several years ago, and keep rediscovering it with amazement ever since.

I have taken the liberty of writing this paper of personal comments, not as a musicologist but as a musician, aware that some of my hypotheses may be challenged (or not) by discoveries and new research by musicologists or other specialists in this field.

The closer we try to approach them, the more we realise that, just like his entire catalogue, Bach's work for organ bears witness to an overflowing innovative imagination that often overturned the barriers of pre-existing forms, and enabled him to write a succession of incomparable works, in each of which he proved to be an authentic pioneer.

Translation : Isabelle Watson

BWV : Bach-Werke-Verzeichnis, Thematisches Verzeichnis der musikalischen Werke von J.S. Bach, ed. Wolfgang Schmieder, Wiesbaden, 1990

BWV : Bach-Werke-Verzeichnis, Kleine Ausgabe, eds. A. Dürr, Y. Kobayashi & K. Beißwenger, Wiesbaden, 1998

NBA : Neue Bach Ausgabe, ed. by Johann-Sebastian-Bach-Institut, Göttingen & Bach-Archiv, Leipzig & Kassel, since 1954

BDok : Bach-Dokumente I, II, III, ed. by W. Neumann & H.J. Schulze, Leipzig & Kassel, 1963/1969/1972

MB : Musikbibliothek der Stadt Leipzig

SPK : Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin

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