

Bach's Definition of *Chor* in his Autograph Documents

Bach personally writes:

In die Kirche zu <i>S. Nicolai</i>	Zu <i>S. Thomæ</i>	Zur neuen Kirche
als	als:	als:
Zum ersten <i>Chor</i> gehören.	Zum 2 <i>Chor</i> .	Zum 3 <i>Chor</i> .
3 <i>Discantisten</i>	3 <i>Discantisten</i>	3 <i>Discantisten</i>
3 <i>Altisten</i>	3 <i>Altisten</i>	3 <i>Altisten</i>
3 <i>Tenoristen</i>	3 <i>Tenoristen</i>	3 <i>Tenoristen</i>
3 <i>Bassisten</i> .	3 <i>Bassisten</i> .	3 <i>Bassisten</i>
	Zum 4 <i>Chor</i> .	
	2 <i>Sopranisten</i>	
	2 <i>Altisten</i>	
	2 <i>Tenoristen</i>	
	2 <i>Bassisten</i> etc.	

Und dieses letztere *Chor* muß auch die *Petri* Kirche besorgen. etc.

Bach-Dokumente I, item 180 (p. 250)

Die Einteilung des Thomanerchores in 4 Chöre

Leipzig, vor dem 18.5.1729

Autograph. 1 Blatt, einseitig beschrieben, gut erhaltenes festes Papier

Stadtarchiv Leipzig, Stift. VIII. B.2.^d (Schuel zu St. Thomas Vol: IV) fol. 520.

This is an autograph document dated Leipzig, May 18, 1729. In it Bach clearly defines the German word *Chor* as he primarily uses it. In the *Entwurf* (August 23, 1730), Bach states:

Zu jedweden musicalischen *Chor* gehören wenigstens 3 *Sopranisten*, 3 *Altisten*, 3 *Tenoristen*, und eben so viel *Baßisten*....(NB. Wiewohl es noch besser, wenn der *Coetus* so beschaffen wäre, daß man zu ieder Stimme 4 *subjecta* nehmen, und also ieden *Chor* mit. 16. Persohnen bestellen könnte.)

[For each musical choir (of voices/vocalists/singers) there should be at least 3 sopranos, 3 altos, 3 tenors and just as many basses....(Mind you that it would be even better if the entire student body [Bach indicates elsewhere that there are 55 *Thomaner* in the present year, 1730] should be constituted in such a way that you could have [take] 4 individuals for each [vocal] part so that each choir [of the

aforementioned 4 choirs] could be populated with 16 singers [persons]{by analogy this would mean that each choir would then consist of 4 sopranos, 4 altos, 4 tenors and 4 basses }].

In addition to the 12 to 16 vocalists in the first three choirs, Bach lists separately his requirements for 18 to 20 instrumentalists, 8 of whom are on the city payroll (city pipers, violinists) and the remaining 10 or so instrumentalists are drawn from the *supernumerari* [the pool of university students (or those studying music privately with Bach)]. This pool of *supernumerari* also supplies *concertists*. It is for these *supernumerari* that Bach is requesting (more) money from the city council. In desperation only, Bach resorts to the political ploy of indicating that some of his singers from the two main choirs sometimes need to substitute for absent or missing instrumentalists. Thus the 3 or 4 singers per part/voice range would be reduced to an untenable number (creating a lack of balance between the 4 vocal parts/ranges). While a serious reduction in vocal forces, as Bach warns the city council members in order to get them to loosen their purse-strings, could prove disastrous for a good performance or at least encumber it with serious difficulties, the reality of the situation, which Bach attempts to gloss over but which must have been apparent to many in Leipzig, was that the *supernumerari* were eager to serve and looked forward to performing music under Bach's direction. Bach must have found various ways to compensate them personally. Bach did indeed want to procure financial assistance for them and reminded the city council members that such remuneration for musical services provided for the main Leipzig churches was part of an older tradition [*wie vor diesem gewöhnlich gewesen* = as it had usually been the case]. However, it is difficult to conceive of a possibility that he would actually have allowed such a dire situation as the one described in the *Entwurf* to take place: to deplete the number of singers for each vocal part/range until only one *concertist* for such a part remained so that all the required instrumental parts could be covered). For this type of thinking, it is necessary to believe that Bach's pool of *supernumerari* was indeed very small and limited. This, however, is not borne out by Telemann's experience as described in his autobiography [in Mattheson's *Ehrenpforte*] where it appeared that, without using any of the *Thomaner*, he never had any problems whatsoever in getting students to perform figural sacred music as vocalists or instrumentalists.