



Regarding Bach's "Art of the Fugue" and Wolfgang Graeser.

When Johann Sebastian Bach felt his end approaching, he inscribed his last secrets which he exchanged with the Great Beyond on a system of four-note lines, without saying whether it was intended for organ, quartet or orchestra. He called the work "Die Kunst der Fugue" (Art of the Fugue). He had only one wish, namely that this work should be engraved on copper and thus be preserved for posterity. A subscription was made to render this possible but it was never completed.

After Bach's death, his sons sold the copper plates for a cash consideration. They became lost and the individual sheets of the "Art of the Fugue" disappeared. A few which were found here and there amongst his effects re-appeared as Fugues in text-books, and it was assumed that they were written for instructional purposes.

Wolfgang Graeser, the son of a German Doctor in Naples and the Chief Physician in a Sanatorium where only famous learned men and artists came in search of rest, had a gift for painting - paintings by the 12-year old Wolfgang were exhibited in Munich.

With a flair for mathematics, nay an infant prodigy in mathematics, and immensely musical - he was looking one day at a sheet of music from which his Mother was playing the violin. This happened to be just a part from the "Art of the Fugue". The individual themes of the fugue appeared to Wolfgang to stand out as mathematical "ornaments" from the numerous other notes, and he said to his Mother "Start again to play this piece backwards or from the middle". She did so, and Wolfgang waxed enthusiastic about this magnificent sound picture.

He said "I want to see the original." It remained the dearest wish of his heart, and drove him at the age of

17 to the National Library in Berlin, where after many years research, he collected together all the Fugues of the entire work.

With this he first went to Straube in Leipzig, who was astonished at young Graeser's audacity and assisted him until the first performance took place. It did not satisfy him, although the entire musical world was astounded at this resuscitation, and regarded it as the greatest musical event of the century.

He continued his work untiringly and completed his task whilst staying at our house. You will find enclosed what he wrote regarding this first performance here. He called it a model example. He wanted to publish the name of Hans Weisbach in his book too, but Hans would not hear of it at all, because it was only assistance and advice which he gave him, in that he offered Graeser hospitality as guest in our house for three weeks, re-arranging the instrumental parts with him again and again during the daytime, had the work re-written every evening by two score-writers, and played the following morning at our house by our string orchestra, in order during the day to ^{re-}arrange anything that did not suit him.

The first performance of "The Art of the Fugue" by Hans Weisbach and his stay at our house was called by Graeser in a letter to his friend two days before his death "the apex of his whole life". Graeser was at that time 20 years old. He was to make a journey of exploration to Egypt in company with mathematicians and scientists. The expenses of the expedition were borne by the German Treasury.

He wished, however, also to produce the later works of Bach as a musical festival in eight evening concerts with Weisbach. He was on the point of taking his Doctor's

degree and wished to complete his Philosophie book. The whole of this played havoc with his nerves so that he suddenly conceived the idea that everyone was persecuting him. No friendly assistance was of any use, until he recovered.

During this period of distress he wrote the enclosed letters.

Mrs. Weisbach expressed the opinion to Mr. Weisbach: "I am afraid Graeser intends killing himself", because he assigned and entrusted all his work to Mr. Weisbach and appointed his good friend Willy Schmid as assistant.

Mrs. Weisbach wrote a letter to Graeser to the following effect: "We will all learn from Goethe 'To keep things within measure'", because Graeser was so unhappy that he could not bring to realisation all ideas which occurred to him at once, and she wanted to ask him to come again, as it was desired to help him.

But other troubles, which had nothing to do with music, confused this wonderfully gifted mind; the faithful, friendly letter never reached him.

In spite of the loving attendance and care of his faithful mother, he escaped to a better life beyond, a loss which the world of art can ill afford.

I must also say that Graeser discovered that the fugal outline of the "Art of the Fugue" exactly resembles the outline of a Gothic Cathedral, if one draws the themes side by side.

Book regarding this will follow.