

This essay is an extract from a study of the same title introducing the facsimile edition of Mus.ms. Bach P200, Bach's autograph and of the printed edition published by the Florence Studio per Edizioni scelte (SPES): www.spes-editore.com; info@spes-editore.com, Lungarno Guicciardini, 9 r., tel.+39 055 21 86 90, fax. +39 055 28 05 92

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Die Kunst der Fuge BWV1080

THE SOURCES

There are two sources for the *Kunst der Fuge*: (A) the manuscript Mus.ms. Bach P200, Bach's autograph that dates back to the first years of the 1740s¹ and (B) the two editions marked *post mortem*², practically coinciding in the musical part but differing in the preface. The autograph manuscript has been handed down in four fascicles. The first and principal of these, which I shall indicate simply as the *Autograph*, to distinguish it from the other three, which I shall call (using an Italian term with a German indication commonly used among scholars) *Appendici/Beilagen 1- 2- 3*, is bound in a volume entitled, probably in the hand of Bach's son-in-law J.C. Altnickol, "*die Kunst der Fuga*" and contains 14 passages in score. In the second fascicle is preserved in the form of *Abklatschvorlage*, or of preparation directed to the printing, the *Canon per Augmentationem contrario motu*. The third fascicle comprises in two pages similar to those of the *Autograph* the version for two cembali of the second pair of mirror fugues for three voices. The last fascicle contains the famous unfinished *Fuga a 3 soggetti*, also in the form of an *Abklatschvorlage* but in tablature.

The following table shows the order of the Contrappunti of the *Autograph* (and therefore not of the *Appendici/Beilagen*) with relation to the printing:

Autograph	Printed Version
I	1
II	3
III	2
IV	5
V	9
VI	[16]
VII	6
VIII	7
IX <i>Canon in Hypodiapason</i>	[18]
X	8
XI	11
XII Canon without title followed in cryptic form (one single stave in the soprano clef with indication of the solution) of the same Canon with the title <i>Canon in Hypodiatesseron al roversio</i> [and then added a second time and in another graphic form] <i>et per augmentationem perpetuus</i>	
XIII	[13], 12
XIV	[14], [15]
XV (but actually XII ^{bis} being a re-elaboration of XII) <i>Canon al roverscio et per augmentationem</i> (Such a version corresponds either with the <i>Appendice/Beilage 1</i> or with the printed version)	[17]

Gerolamo Frescobaldi is of fundamental importance in the genesis of *The Art of Fugue*. Unfortunately scholars make only general mention of him on the basis of a reference by Bach's second son, Carl Philipp Emanuel, and through a copy of the

¹ The autograph is preserved in the Deutsche Staatsbibliothek in Berlin: BB Mus.ms. Bach P200. The first part (I-VIII) is probably from the years 1740-1742 while the second part (IX-XV) is from the years 1742-1746. vd. D. SEATON, *The Autograph: An Early Version of the "Art of Fugue"* in *Bach's "Art of Fugue": An Examination of the Sources*, Seminar Report in *Current Musicology*, XIX, Department of Music Columbia University, 1975, p. 55; WEISS WISSO & KOBAYASHI YOSHITAKE, *Katalog der Wasserzeichen in Bachs Originalhandschriften. Neue Bach Ausgabe IX/1* [I, II] (1985); KOBAYASHI YOSHITAKE, *Zur Chronologie der Spätwerke Johann Sebastian Bachs. Kompositions- und Aufführungstätigkeit von 1736 bis 1750*, *Bach Jahrbuch (hereafter BJB)*, Vol. 74 (1988), 7-72, (in particular pp. 51-52). For the physical description of the manuscript and the writing of the separate covers see *Johann Sebastian Bach, Neue Ausgabe Sämtlicher Werke*, serie VIII Band 2, *Die Kunst der Fuge*, Kritischer Bericht von KLAUS HOFMANN, Bärenreiter, Kassel, 1996 (hereafter *Kritischer Bericht NBA*): Autograph in bound volume pp. 21-26, Appendice/Beilage 1 pp. 49-50, Appendice/Beilage 2 pp. 50-51, Appendice/Beilage 3 pp. 54-55.

² There are various dispersed editions preserved: a detailed list with the physical description of the exemplars, in *Kritischer Bericht NBA*, cit., pp. 13-20.

Fiori Musicali that appears to have belonged to Bach from 1714. This results, according to James Ladewig³, from a widespread distrust, particularly on the part of German scholars, with regard to Italian influences on Bach, considered a musician limited to the German world in general, the Lutheran in particular. Leaving aside the motivated hostility of German musicians of the 18th century to the *prise de pouvoir* in German courts by Italian opera (exercised commonly also in general by the "cari Sassoni" Handel and in particular by Hasse in Dresden) on the contrary the universal aspect of the Kantor is shown in the careful study he makes of what is generally known as the *stile antico*].

From this point of view he overcomes the geographical, temporal and cultural limits of his time to ally himself with a cultural and religious *koiné* of universal extent. In particular the strong influence on Bach of the music of Frescobaldi is clear, as far as concerns the general conception, whether aesthetic or theological, the structure of the polythematic *Ricercare* and the formulation of the themes and of the *obblighi*. In the works of Bach, with particular reference to *die Kunst der Fuge*, the following points of contact are seen:

1. The importance of writing in score.
2. The writing in "*mensural*" values, double in the printing of the *Art of Fugue* in relation to the Autograph.
3. The use of the theme and its inversion that harks back to the first two *Capricci* of Frescobaldi based respectively on the ascending and descending hexachord.
4. The polythematic character of the *Ricercare*, and more particularly the trithematic (Frescobaldi's *Ricercare IX* is actually tetrathematic) that sees the individual themes, at first developed on their own, then combined in the final section.
5. The use of augmentation and diminution of the themes.
6. The theology of the *Kyrie* that sees for example the mingling of the theme of the person of the Son and of the Paraclete with that of the Father in the unique divinity, whether in the *Kyrie* and *Christe* of the *Fiori Musicali*, particularly in the *Messa della Domenica*, or also in the *Fuga BWV 552* of the third *Clavier Übung*.
7. The use of *obblighi*.
8. The use of chromaticism, particularly in Bach's *Contrapunctus XI*, used by Frescobaldi, in a compositionally anomalous form, programmatically and virtuosistically, in the chromatic *Capriccio VIII* with its contrary ligatures (that is dissonances resolved upwards) and in *Capriccio IX di durezza* other than in expressive function in the other *Capricci* and in the *Fiori Musicali* (a remarkable example in the *Toccata Cromatica per l'Elevazione* of the *Messa della Domenica*).
9. The analogy between *Contrapunctus IV* and *Capriccio III sopra il Cucho*.
10. The idea of the third subject on BACH of the *Fuga a 3 soggetti* as final signature of the cycle parallel to Frescobaldi's *GiroLamo/GiroLmeta* (*Capriccio sopra la Girolmeta* at the end of the *Fiori Musicali*).
11. The subject BACH is very probably suggested by the theme of the *Ricercare sopra Mi Re Fa Mi* (already prefigured in *Fantasia VI*).
12. The common use of the *Bergamasca* (*Fiori Musicali* and *Goldberg Variations*) as the end of a serious cycle in cheerful combination with another theme (*Ruggero* in the *Fiori Musicali*, *Kraut und Rüben* and the ground bass in the *Goldberg Variations*).
13. The thematic influence of *Recercar I* on the theme of the *Fugue in C sharp minor* BWV 849 of Book I of the *Wohltemperierte Klavier*, that has a certain resemblance to the BACH theme.
14. The influence of the theme of *Recercar X* on *La, Fa, Sol, La, Re* on the *Fugue in C minor* BWV 871 of Book I of the *Wohltemperiertes Klavier* (where there also appears a wonderful augmentation).
15. *Soggetto*, *Obligo* and *Ricercar* are terms typical in Frescobaldi's works and more generally of counterpoint of the 16th and 17th centuries (apart from those of Frescobaldi the *Ricercari* of Battiferri were known in Germany).
16. The term *Alto Modo* is frequent in the *Fiori Musicali*.
17. The same conception of the third *Clavierübung* goes back to the cycle of *Masses* of the *Fiori Musicali*.
18. The attested presence in the catalogue *post mortem* of the books of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach of *XVI Ricercari* of Girolamo Frescobaldi under the heading *Von verschiednen Meistern*.
19. The existence in the Bibliothèque Royale of Brussels of a manuscript belonging to J. G. Harrer, contemporary and successor of Bach in Leipzig, entitled "*Ricercari / del S^t Girolamo Fresco- / baldi / Organista della Basilica / di S. Pietro / in/Roma*" containing various *Ricercari* e *Capricci*.
20. The artistic analogy with Frescobaldi stemming from an observation by Forkel in Chapter V of the biography when at the start of a listing of "*transgressions*" by Bach of the ordinary rules he writes: "*He allowed himself octaves and fifths only when it would produce a good effect, that is when the reason for their prohibition no longer existed*". Frescobaldi in the Preface *A gli studiosi dell'Opera* in the *Capricci* writes exactly (with absolutely erroneous punctuation!): "*hò voluto avvertire che in quelle cose, che non paressero regolate, con l'uso del contrapunto, si debba primieramente cercar l'affetto di quel passo e il fine dell'Autore circa la dilettazone dell'udito ed il modo che si ricerca nel sonare.*" [I have wanted to indicate that in those things that may seem not be in conformity with the

³ «The reason Bach's debt to Frescobaldi in this piece has escaped notice for so long is twofold. First, the Germanic bias of much Bach scholarship has subtly tended to downplay the influence of Italian music.» J. LADEWIG, *Bach and the Prima pratica: The Influence of Frescobaldi on a Fugue from the Well-Tempered Clavier*, in *The Journal of Musicology*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (Summer, 1991), p. 364 and in the related note 21 «Gerhard Herz calls attention to this prejudice in his *Essays on J. S. Bach*, p. 171».

rules of counterpoint it is necessary above all to seek out the *affect* of that passage and the aim of the Composer to satisfy the ear and the way it should be played.]

21. With regard to the much discussed *Fuga a 3 soggetti*, in the lack of certain documents there are no valid reasons for excluding it from the cycle. There is a marked analogy of the initial subject with the fundamental theme in the *passaggiata* form, as it appears at the start of *Contrapunctus 5* in the identity of the first four notes as well as their harmonic correspondence.



Clearly the inverted fundamental theme is present in the second subject.

It is probable that the variation in the *Fuga a 3 soggetti* of the fundamental theme, recto and in inversion, on the other hand already subjected to progressive changes in the course of the cycle, may be determined by adaptability to the combination with the third name theme. Consequently the idea that the Fugue ought to be completed by the insertion of the fundamental theme may be absolutely excluded (an idea originating with G. Nottebohm) insofar as to have such striking resemblance in the statement of two themes (the fundamental and the first subject of the Fugue) is certainly contrapuntally irregular.

The printed editions are probably supported and followed above all by Fr. Wilh. Marburg, to whom can be ascribed the didactic title of the cycle, *die Kunst der Fuge*, that he terms *Exempeln*, both present in the treatise published by him in 1753. A possible title by Bach could have been *Clavier Übung (V)*. By analogy with the *Contrappunti* the more proper title by Bach would have been *Ricercari* by analogy with the *Ricercar a 6 voci* of *The Musical Offering*.

The custom by expert musicologists of completing old compositions with their own inventions, whether with regard to Monteverdi or to Bach, must decisively be described as *Romantic misapprehension* (an expression coined by Gregory Butler). The improper practice is above all determined by a confusion of references relative to the unfinished *Fuga a 3 soggetti*, as only the Obituary (and consequently Gerber and Forkel) makes reference to it as the penultimate, followed by a final fugue with four subjects in inversion, note for note: «Seine letzte Krankheit, hat ihm verhindert, seinem Entwurfe nach, die vorletzte Fuge völlig zu Ende zu bringen, und die letzte [allerletzte in Forkel], welche 4 Themata enthalten, und nachgehends in allen 4 Stimmen Note für Note umgekehret werden sollte, auszuarbeiten». It is thought legitimate to recompose the lost part of the Fugue, mixing up what is written in the Obituary on a *letzte* Fugue with four subjects with what is indicated in the *Avertissements* of 1751, the *Nachricht* of the first edition and the *Vorbericht* of Marburg in which there is no mention of a *Fuga a quattro soggetti* and which solely declares the incompleteness of the last Fugue at the point of insertion of the third theme in which Bach is identified by name: *Avertissement 7 Maggio 1751* « Die letzten Stück sind zwey Fugen für zwey unterschiedene Claviere oder Flügel, und eine Fuge mit drey Sätzen, wo der Verfasser bey Anbringung des dritten Satzes seinen Namen Bach ausgeführt hat » *Nachricht* « die letzte Fuge, wo er sich bey Anbringung des dritten

Satzes namentlich zu erkennen giebet, zu Ende zu bringen» and *Vorbericht* « seiner letzten Fuge, wo er sich bey Anbringung des dritten Satzes namentlich zu erkennen giebet, überraschet».

Incorrect too, moreover, is the hypothesis that the reference in the Obituary to the inversions note for note, amplified for publicity by the heirs through the compositorial wonder of the two mirror pairs, can be regarded as valid support for a lost inverted fugue based on four themes: that would reduce the keyboard possibility of the cycle in view of the extreme practical difficulty on the keyboard that stems from the two existing pairs based on a single subject, which would be enormously multiplied, without taking account of the further anomaly of the fact that from two mirror inversions based on one subject it would pass directly to one on four subjects.

The Art of Fugue, moreover, achieves numerical completeness based on the nominal number 14 (as, on the other hand, even though with a different order and various passages, the *Autograph*) with the *Fuga a 3 soggetti*, in which the third subject comes with the authorship confirmed in a secular trinitarian fashion with the name BACH. In such a sense the four *Canoni* become a technical adjunct, either manual or compositorial, analogous to the four duets of *Clavierübung III* and to the autograph Appendix of 14 Canons in Bach's copy of the *Goldberg Variations*.

As far as concerns aesthetic polemic it is probable that the younger Johann Adolph Scheibe, then 29, would have been prompted to write his criticisms through the animosity of his father towards Bach, because of the observations on his instruments, in particular those on the organ of the Paulinerkirche in Leipzig in the inspection report of 17th December 1717. This is also on the basis of a sibylline note in the Obituary relative to the inspection made by Bach of the elder Scheibe's organ in the Leipzig Johanneskirche. The theorist/practician Johann Mattheson too, *Aristoxenos junior*, quite ambiguous in regard to Bach, could have suggested it insofar as in the second year of his "*Critica Musica*" review, the title of which cannot but recall that of the weekly founded in Hamburg fifteen years later by the younger Scheibe, "*Der Critische Musicus*", he ridicules the *Practicus hodiernus* Bach for his musical treatment of the text in *Cantata BWV 21*.

Consequently it can be supposed that the *Goldberg Variations* interrupted the progress of *The Art of Fugue* and were then published in the early 1740s, as suited their pleasing, if highly expert, character, lending less to aesthetic criticism.

As far as concerns the printed edition, this was in two printings practically identical but with different Prefaces: the first is generally attributed to Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, while the second, greatly extended, bears the signature of Friedrich Wilhelm Marpurg. Nevertheless various similarities between the two Prefaces lead me to suppose that Marpurg may have been the author of both.

In the following table the numbers indicate the order of the printed version (forming the 24 *Exempeln* to which the various *Avertissements* announcing the sale make reference) while the numbers in square brackets indicate the probable order, followed in the present recording and based either on the Autograph (for the two mirror pairs and the *Canon in Hypodiatesseron al roverscio et per Augmentationem perpetuus in Contrario motu* placed, unlike the printed version, after the *Canon in Hypodiapason alla Ottava*) or on the proposals of Butler in 1983 with regard to the *Fuga a 3 soggetti*. Added for reference are the BWV numbers. The asterisk indicates Contrapuncti not present, totally or in substantial parts, in the Autograph (*Contrapunctus 4*, the introductory 22 bars of *Contrapunctus 10* and two Canons). The second mirror pair brings a practical alternative in the pair for two harpsichords that then bear the same order number. The final Chorale is not numbered in square brackets since it is clearly declared by the heirs as added to make up for the incompleteness of the *Fuga a 3 Soggetti*. The correspondence between the Autograph and the printed version is duly indicated in the preceding table.

Order of the Contrapuncti of the Printed Version	
1	Contrapunctus 1 BWV 1080,1
2	Contrapunctus 2 BWV 1080,2
3	Contrapunctus 3 BWV 1080,3
4*	Contrapunctus 4 BWV 1080,4
5	Contrapunctur [sic] 5 BWV 1080,5
6	Contrapunctus 6 a 4 in Stylo Francese BWV 1080,6
7	Contrapunctus 7 a 4 per Augment et Diminut: BWV 1080,7
8	Contrapunctus 8 a 3 BWV 1080,8
9	Contrapunctus 9 a 4 alla Duodecima BWV 1080,9
10*	Contrapunctus 10 a 4 alla Decima BWV 1080,10
11	Contrapunctus 11 a 4 BWV 1080,11
12 [12b]	Contrapunctus inversus 12 a 4 BWV 1080,12, ²
13 [12a]	Contrapunctus inversus [rectus] a 4 BWV 1080,12, ¹
14 [13b]	Contrapunctus a 3 BWV 1080,13, ²
15 [13a]	Contrapunctus inversus a 3 BWV 1080,13, ¹
16 [10a]=10 without 22 bars of introduction. Not recorded	Contrap. a 4 BWV 1080,10a
17 [18]	Canon per Augmentationem in Contrario Motu BWV 1080,14
18 [15]	Canon alla Ottava BWV 1080,15
19 [16]*	Canon alla Decima Contrap[p]unto alla Terza BWV 1080,16
20 [17]*	Canon alla Duodecima in Contrap[p]unto alla Quinta BWV 1080,17
21 [13a bis, in the recording No. 19]	Fuga a 2 Clav. BWV 1080,18, ¹
22 [13b bis, in the recording No. 20]	Alio modo Fuga a 2 Clav. BWV 1080,18, ²

23 [14]	Fuga a 3 Soggetti BWV 1080,19
24 Not recorded	Choral. <i>Wenn wir in hoechsten Noethen</i> Canto fermo in Canto. BWV 1080,20

Passing to the special compositional features of *The Art of Fugue*, the specifications *all'Ottava, alla Decima, alla Duodecima* indicate the procedures of double counterpoint, to which Bach applied himself particularly in the second half of the 1730s. According to Zarlino's definition (GIOSEFFO ZARLINO, *Le Istitutioni Harmoniche*, cit., Part Three, Chapter 56, p. 229) double counterpoint "non è altro, che una Compositione fatta ingegnosamente, che si può cantare a più modi, mutando le sue parti, di maniera, che replicata si oda diverso concerto da quello, che nelle istesse parti primieramente si udiva". [it is a subtly elaborated composition that can be sung in different ways, changing the voices so that, repeated, music can be heard different from that which was heard before with the same voices.]

In the *Gradus ad Parnassum* of Fux, an example of what pertains to Bach, in *Il Liber, Exercitii V, Lectio V* is found the following explanation of double counterpoint in general:

«Of Double Counterpoint

By double counterpoint is understood a composition formed in such a manner that the same part can be convertible and the part that now is found above, by inversion may be found below. It is called double counterpoint, in my opinion, because apart from the inversion of the parts, with none of the rest altered, it renders a double melody, and different by reason of high and low pitch.

And here more in particular as the procedure is explained as regards double counterpoint at the twelfth (analogous procedure to the other types of double counterpoint):

Esercizio V, Lectio VII «Of Double Counterpoint at the Twelfth.

Double counterpoint at the twelfth is a composition in which one of two or more parts can be transposed a twelfth, either high or low. Which intervals can be used and which avoided is shown in the following series of numbers:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
12	11	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1

This table shows that all the intervals are used in this counterpoint apart from those that have already been mentioned: that is not to use the sixth and the seventh resolved into a sixth. Of the rest the twelfth must not be exceeded».

Bach's study of double counterpoint is confirmed by autograph pages recently discovered in Kiev and exercises of his eldest son Wilhelm Friedemann in double counterpoint and canons, among which appears the theme of *The Art of Fugue*.

Bach was further stimulated to the composition of the cycle by a work of Johann Mattheson, *Der wol klingenden Fingersprache, Erster und zweiter Theil, 1735, 1737*, with which there are a number of structural points of contact. It is possible that the heirs of Bach were inspired to insert the final chorale *Wenn wir in hoechsten Noethen sein (Vor deinen Thron tret' Ich hiermit)*, to compensate the buyer for the incompleteness of the *Fuga a 3 soggetti*, by the second edition of Mattheson's work (issued with the French title *les Doits parlans* [sic!] in 1749 and concluded by a fugue on the chorale *Werde munter mein Gemüthe*).

As regards the second couple of mirror Contrapuncti a 3 voci the identification of a *recto* version and an *inverso* is not clearly definable. Nevertheless on the basis of the confirmation that the *Abklatschvorlage* of the Contrapunctus that bears the definition *inversus* is attributed to Bach's hand and on the guidance of the Autograph that sees this counterpoint as superimposed on the other, I prefer to maintain, for the sake of simplicity, the distinction *rectus* and *inversus*, according, yet, to the catalogue of Schmieder, *rectus* BWV 1080,13/1 and *inversus* BWV 1080, 13/2. For explanation of the term *inversus* in the printed version it is probable that the definition refers rather to single counterpoint than to the two procedures applied, the inversion of the melodic lines, based on the equivalence F/F, and the reversal of the structure of the score (according to the definition of Marpurg: *Doppeltverkehrter Contrapunkt*).

Relative to the Appendice/Beilage 2 the pages, now single, numbered 20 and 21, were originally together in a double page containing the two fugues written each on two pages, one in front of the other, to avoid turning. The separation has resulted in two separate pages in which the first part of each fugue carries on the back the end of the other.

The edition J. S. BACH: *Die Kunst der Fuge BWV 1080, Autograph-Originaldruck*, Faksimile-Reihe Bachscher Werke und Schriftstücke, Bach-Archiv Leipzig, Band 14, 1979, Leipzig und Mainz, reproduces a version in which inexplicably page 20 recto is repeated twice and page 21 recto is completely omitted. There is a printing of the same year, probably in correction of this error, in which, however, each Fugue has on the verso the relative conclusion, a solution that corrects musically and is absolutely anomalous, therefore, as a Facsimile.

Science and/or Music

The greatness of Bach comes precisely from the masterly way in which, from a purely speculative conception, he reaches an expressive object: this appears clearly in the *Goldberg Variations* in which the technique of canon is triumphantly transfigured into the sphere of pure art, while the recent discovery of fourteen Canons shows that Bach, very probably at the

prompting of his former pupil Mizler, composes such a manuscript appendix in his printed copy of the *Goldberg* as a learned display in enigmatic form, truly and precisely a Puzzle, according to a custom that was still widespread in theorists' circles⁴.

Confirmation of such an aspect of learned amusement comes from Forkel's biography, derived certainly from information of C.Ph.E. Bach, on the genre of *Quodlibet* and the custom that the early members of the Bach family had of meeting *semel in anno* to sing together cheerful popular melodies⁵. Bach was firm in his continuation of such convivial activity and there is vivid evidence of it in the goblet that the two Krebs probably gave Bach, perhaps in 1735 for his fiftieth birthday: on this the name of Bach appears recto and *cancrizans* (Krebs = Crab) in clear indication of the playful aspect that theoretical speculation could assume.

The greater emphasis on the conceptual and numerological aspect alone of Bach's work is extremely reductive, to the detriment of the emotional aspect that transfigures the powerful structure into pure art⁶. Bach became the fourteenth member of the *Societas* founded by Lorenz Christoph Mizler (to which other distinguished musicians such as Handel belonged - in honorary form - and Telemann) only in July 1747 (the connection with the numerology of the name is clear), but that he in a certain sense complied with the illuminist and Pythagorean enthusiasm of the founder through friendship and not *sua sponte* is clearly written by C. Ph. Emanuel towards the end of the Obituary, devised together with Johann Friedrich Agricola and inserted in the last number of the review founded by the indefatigable Mizler, *Musicalische Bibliothek*, of 1754:

«He entered the Society of Musical Sciences in the month of June of the year 1747 at request of the Court Counsellor [Hofrath] Mizler of whom he was an excellent friend and to whom, when he still studied in Leipzig, he had taught the harpsichord and composition. He left to the Society the chorale Von Himmel hoch, da komm Ich her completely worked out that he later had engraved. He further presented the canon reproduced on Table IV, page 16, and would certainly have done more if he had not been prevented by the shortness of time, given that he was only three years in this Society⁷.

But the good Emanuel goes further and this certainly ought to put into perspective algorithmic, Pythagorean and cabalistic enthusiasm in the actual study of Bach.

In a letter in eleven points, sent from Hamburg on 13th January 1775 by the 61-year-old Carl Philipp Emanuel in reply to questions posed by Forkel we read the following:

Philipp Emanuel in reply to questions posed by Forkel we read the following:

«The biography of my late father in the review of Mizler, my dear friend, was written quickly by the late Agricola [dead the preceding year] and myself in Berlin, and Mizler did no more than add the passage starting from the words: He entered the Society [...] up to the end»⁸.

This final note in the Obituary, then, is clearly stated to have been inserted with pride by Mizler, former pupil of Bach, as promoter of the Society and editor of the Review.

Carl Philipp, who, in careful clarification, declares himself the very dear friend of Mizler, still alive up to 1778 (bearing in mind that the letter is from 1775), adds an observation that very probably reports the real view that his father had of the Society and here reflects:

«This addition is not of great importance: the deceased, in my view and that of all true musicians, was no real friend of dry and mathematical things.»⁹

⁴ This concerns the printed copy of the *Goldberg Variations* that belonged to Bach, cited for the first time by Forkel, as mentioned below. This was found in Strasbourg in 1974, where it was in the possession of the pianist Paul Blumenrøder, and was acquired by the Paris Bibliothèque Nationale in 1975. The disputes among Italian theorists of the eighteenth century are well known. Bach for his part solves a canon of 1597 by Teodoro Riccio: CHR. WOLFF, *The New Bach Reader*, [NBR] edited by H. T. David and A. Mendel, revised and enlarged by C. Wolff, W. W. Norton, New York, 1998, NBR}, p. 211.

⁵ v. infra the quotation from Forkel's biography.

⁶ In Vikram Seth's novel *An Equal Music* the cellist Billy foresees that musicians and composers will become superfluous: *Prendete le fughe, per esempio: già adesso si può fare qualunque cosa col computer. Gli dite che volete ripetere un soggetto alla dodicesima, aumentato, invertito e con un ritardo di una battuta e mezzo; toccate qualche tasto ed è fatta* (VIKRAM SETH, *Una musica costante/An Equal Music*, Tascabili degli editori associati, Milano, 2006, p. 373). The clever and scrupulous writer is misinformed, with musicians absolutely convinced that *The Art of Fugue* belongs, as still unfortunately indicated in Bach catalogues, to *Kammermusik*, and therefore must be performed by quartet-players, while scholars of so-called early music belong to an eccentric fraternity. This does not prevent the leading characters, because of the unusual expansion of the masterpiece, actually for keyboard, for string quartet, having to have recourse to bizarre experts in early music for organological advice and to have an adequate instrument made. It goes on in the end that supporting character Julia will play it, naturally and unfortunately on the piano, without the slightest mention of the harpsichord.

⁷ Bach-Dokumente (hereafter BD) III 666, p. 88, herausgegeben vom Bach-Archiv, Bärenreiter, Kassel, 1963 (Band I), 1969 (Band II), 1972 (Band III). The Society failed, as also the review, through the inactivity of the members and perhaps also the changed interests of the mercurial Mizler, who graduated in medicine, taking employment in this capacity in Warsaw.

⁸ BD III 803.

⁹ «Es ist nicht viel wehrt. Der seelige war, wie ich u. alle eigentlichen *Musici*, kein Liebhaber, von trockenem mathematischen Zeuge». It may be useful also to remember a passage in a letter that Kirnberger mentions as having been received from Carl Philipp Emanuel (J. PH. KIRNBERGER, *Die Kunst des reinen Satzes in der Musik*, Voss, Berlin, 1771, Teil II/3, p. 188, BD III 767): «Was übrigens der Herr Capellmeister Bach in Hamburg von der vortrefflichen Werke des Herrn Marpurgs halte, zeugen einige Stellen aus einem Briefe, den dieser berühmte Mann an mich geschrieben hat. "Das Betragen von Herr Marpurg gegen Ihnen ist verabscheuungswürdig". Ferner: "Dass meine und meines seel. Vaters Grundsätze antirameauisch sind, können Sie laut sagen"». (*For the rest what Kapellmeister Bach in Hamburg* [Carl

Philipp] held of the excellent works of Herr Marpurg, is shown in some points in a letter that this illustrious man wrote me: "The conduct of Herr Marpurg towards you is deplorable" Further: "You can declare loudly that my principles and those of my father are anti-Rameau"). The surprising anti-Marpurg quotation of the (apparently) mild Carl Philipp, if true, reveals disagreements that can perhaps be from the period of the preparation of the printing of the *KdF*, during which the feverish activity of Marpurg in quest of personal affirmation as a theorist had perhaps disturbed the heirs and in particular Carl Philipp, who saw in a certain sense a diminution in the interest in his treatise on the keyboard from Marpurg's publication: *Die Kunst das Clavier zu spielen*, 1750, a title quite significant in that year (for the term *Kunst*) and that clearly followed Couperin's *l'Art de toucher le clavecin*, as too above all the *Anleitung zum Clavierspielen*, 1755, translated into French the year after, closely threatened, from an editorial and commercial point of view, much felt by Carl Philipp, the *Versuch* of 1753. The fact in any case is significant that Forkel, whose closeness to Carl Philipp is well known, recommended in Chapter VII of his biography of Bach Kirnberger's treatise in highly laudatory terms, and not Marpurg's. The passage in Forkel is as follows: «Wer die Bachische Lehrmethode in der Composition nach ihrem Umfange kennen lernen will, findet sie in Kirnbergs *Kunst des reinen Satzes* hinlänglich erläutert». But certainly it dealt with one of such questions among theorists as a passage a little earlier in the same volume of Kirnberger shows: «Eben so wenig gründlich sind die betrachtungen [of Marpurg] über den dritten Vorzug der Kirnbergerischen Temperatur. Er quael und maertert sich zwar, um diesen auch weg zu disputiren, calculirt hin und wieder, sucht Herrn Se. Bach, Telemann u. mit ins Spiel zu bringen, schmeichelt seine Leser, und bittelt manchmal um ihren beyfall dem allen ohngeachtet wird er doch niemanden überzeugen.» (Similarly ill-founded are the considerations [of Marpurg] with reference to the third of Kirnberger's temperaments [dealing with tuning like Kirnberger III]. It is true that he torments and martyrs himself to refute this too, calculating and recalculating, trying to bring Herr Seb. Bach and Telemann into the game, flattering his readers, sometimes begging their agreement but nevertheless convincing absolutely no-one.)

The polemic between Marpurg and Kirnberger (whose treatise offers many points of similarity with Marpurg's *Abhandlung von der Fuge nach dem Grundsätzen und Exempeln der besten deutschen und ausländischen Meister*, Berlin, Haude e Spener, 1753 (I Part), 1754 (II Part) that preceded it by 18 years - 1753) had an important reply from the former in his *Versuch über die musicalische Temperatur, nebst einem Anhang über den Rameau-und Kirnbergerschen Grundbass, und vier Tabellen*, J. Fr. Korn, Breslau, 1776: «Man komme mir hier mit keiner Auctorität aus den vorigen Jahrhunderten, wo man drey Tonarten hässlich machte, um eine einzige recht schöne zu erhalten; oder man erzähle mir nicht, dass dieser oder jener Musiker oder Liebhaber eine um 81:80 veränderte Terz approbiret hat[...]. Der Hr. Kirnberger selbst hat mir und andern mehrmahl erzählt, wieder berühmte Jo. Seb. Bach ihm, während der Zeit seines von demselben genossnen musikalischen Unterrichts, die Stimmung seines Claviers übertragen, und wie dieser Meister ausdrücklich von ihm verlangt, alle grosse Terzen scharf zu machen. In einer Temperatur, wo alle grosse Terzen etwas scharf, d.i. wo sie alle über sich schweben sollen, kann unmöglich eine reine grosse Terz statt finden, und sobald keine reine grosse Terz statt findet, so ist auch keine um 81:80 erhöhte grosse Terz möglich. Der Hr. Capellmeister Joh. Seb. Bach, welcher nicht ein durch einen bösen Calcul verdorbnes Ohr hatte, musste also empfunden haben, dass derselbe wohl seine aus allen 24 Tönen gesetzte Präludien und Fugen die *Kunst der Temperatur* betitelt?». (One comes to me here with no authority from past centuries, where three tonalities were made hateful, to hold one as quite beautiful; or I am not told that this or that musician or amateur has approved a third modified 81:80 [syntonic comma][...] Herr Kirnberger himself has often related to me and others how the famous Joh. Seb. Bach, during the period of the musical instruction he had enjoyed from him, had handed on the way in which he tuned his own harpsichord, and how this master had expressly requested him to make all major thirds sharp. In a temperament in which all major thirds are slightly sharp, that is where they are all wider, it is impossible to find a pure major third, and since it is given that there is no pure major third, so it is not possible to increase any major third 81:80. Herr Capellmeister Joh. Seb. Bach, whose ear was not impaired by any bad calculation, must therefore have found that a major third raised 81:80 is a terrible interval. Why did he not entitle his Preludes and Fugues composed in all 24 keys die *Kunst der Temperatur*? [and also the term KUNST appears to indicate actually the *Wohltemperiertes Clavier*] BD III 815.

Here a digression on Bach's tuning of the harpsichord is necessary. Recently the design of the frontispiece of the autograph of Book I of the *Wohltemperiertes Clavier* of 1722 has opened the way to many proposed interpretations as Bach's suggestion of the practice of tuning.



The scholars Andreas Sparschuh, Michael Zapf, and John Charles Francis have with various arguments interpreted the loops as indication of the tuning of fifths. Finally BRADLEY LEHMAN, *Bach's extraordinary temperament: our Rosetta Stone*, Early Music, Volume 33, Number 1,

The meaning of such a remark appears too at the end of Chapter VIII of Forkel's biography:

«It would be of little importance certainly to note [my bold type] that in 1747 he became a member of the Society and Musical Sciences founded by Mizler, if we did not owe to this circumstance the admirable chorale Vom Himmel hoch etc that he wrote as test of admission, a work that was later engraved.»¹⁰

The present tendency of Bach studies, wonderfully algorithmic, has thus come to be decisively realigned. Before confronting more directly some questions concerning the *Goldberg* and the *KdF* I want to call attention back to the character of J. S. Bach as it is outlined by contemporaries and by the generation immediately following.

Amid such Bachian lobotomy a simple enterological examination can be useful to sound out the heart of the Kantor with the help of some Bach documents and proceeding through two short corollaries.

February 2005, Oxford University Press, pp. 3-23 has proposed a particular interpretation of the design, read upside down, defending it against many critics.



Unfortunately my personal very strong idiosyncrasy as far as concerns interpretations also minimally esoteric or in any case based on emotionalism that take gestures of sensationalism and of the wish for success (and our period has a daily example of it that has contaminated all scientific areas: see, for example, the wonder of *cold fusion*) makes me instinctively sceptical of a reading that is based on the ornamental design of a frontispiece, above all with the condition that it be read upside down.

I definitely prefer (according to the words of Carl Philipp in Part Three, Note 134: «*Es ist nicht viel wehrt. Der seelige war, wie ich u. alle eigentlichen Musici, kein Liebhaber, von trockenem mathematischen Zeuge.*») to follow Marpurg's tuning and this too in the light of what I have already explained and continue to explain and that is to attribute to him an intimate knowledge of the final Bach and a very close proximity to the *KdF*. The firm opposition, moreover, of Marpurg to unequal temperaments can indicate, anyway, an evolution that from 1722, granted the legitimacy of the interpretation of the design, can have carried Bach in the last decade of his life to prefer equal tuning. In his *Principes du Clavecin*, Haude et Spener, Berlin, 1756, (the German edition *Anleitung zum Clavierspielen* with the same editors appeared in the preceding year) in paragraph 4, p. 2ssq., he tackles the problem of tuning, indicating clearly equal temperament as preferable: «Il faut [...] que l'instrument soit bien d'accord [...] Car je ne saurois m'imaginer qu'un bon musicien puisse appeler cela [as in other places below that I shall not adduce: Marpurg apologizes at the beginning for possible errors: J'en demande grace aux François] être d'accord, quand les accords parfaits majeurs de si, de fa* [the asterisk indicates the ♯], d'ut, et de la ♭-mol, et les accords parfaits mineurs de fa, de si ♭-mol, et de mi ♭-mol, font un autre effet sur l'oreille, que les accords parfaits majeurs ou mineurs des autres tons. Qu'on ne me dise pas, que l'on ne compose ou que l'on ne jouë guères dans ces sortes de tons [...] Il est donc de conséquence, d'égaliser la proportion des intervalles dans l'accord du Clavecin et pour le faire, il faut: 1) que toute Tierce majeure soit un peu plus forte qu'elle ne doit l'être, c'est-à-dire, un peu plus au dessus de sa justesse, et 2) que toute Quinte soit un peu plus faible qu'elle ne doit l'être, c'est-à-dire, un peu au dessous de sa justesse. Pour les autres intervalles, ils seront tous bons, quand ces deux-là le seront. Que l'Octave doive être juste par-tout, cela s'entend de soi-même. Voici un modèle pour accorder un Clavecin de cette manière, fondé sur le système du célèbre Mr. Sorge, aussi bon Harmoniste qu'habile Mathématicien.» There follows in four *Procès* the explanation of a perfect equal temperament chord. Marpurg adds another possibility for tuning, slightly unequal: «Cependant comme il y a peut être des personnes qui auront de la peine à s'accomoder de cette nouvelle manière d'accorder le Clavecin fondée sur l'égalité du tempérament, je vais encore rapporter la meilleur des partitions inégales qui soient en usage. Elle consiste à n'affoiblir que les sept premières Quintes en commençant par fa [from the example they will be: F-C, C-G, G-D, D-A, A-E, E-B, B-F*] et à rendre les cinq autres un peu plus justes ou plutôt moins faibles [from the example they will be: F*-C*, C*-G*, A*-E*, E*-B*, B*-F]. Si tous les accords ne deviennent pas également bons, ils deviennent du moins tolérables.»

That Bach should prefer equal or minimally unequal harpsichord tuning (supported, qv. note 17, also by Sorge, on whose system is founded Marpurg's model of harpsichord tuning, as established above) according probably to Marpurg's indications, is not so strange seeing that Frescobaldi too was accused by the patronising musicologist Doni of having given attention to a «*pannosus quidam senex [...] qui nihil aliud sciret, quam modice polyplectrum pulsare; obtruderetque tamquam novum utilissimumque inventum, eam semitoniorum aequalitatem quam vulgo Aristoxeneis, sed iniuria tribuunt; [...] nobilemque illum physauletem Psychogaurum, qui tunc Palatinae musicae praeerat, frequentibus et gratuitis comotationibus usqueadeo demulserit, ut eum non puduerit contra fidem aurium suarum, praeclarum hoc inventum in caelum extollere apud optimum Principem*» (old beggar [...] who knows nothing else than how to play the harpsichord badly and who boasted a new and very useful invention, and that is that equalisation of semitones that generally, but wrongly, has come to be attributed to Aristoxenus [...] and that attracted that famous physaulete Psychogaurus [here Doni makes a display of very silly erudition by indicating in Greek periphrasis the name and profession of Frescobaldi] then at the head of Palatine music [that is St Peter's] with frequent and gratuitous libations, to such a point that he did not shame to go against the evidence of his own ears in extolling to heaven such a famous invention before the best of Princes), MARK LINDLEY, *Journal of Music Theory*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (Autumn, 1980), pp. 166-203. The slander of the musicologist, a class then as now troublesome - in any case much less so than that of the critics - but also the pleasure of practical musicians informs on 29th February 1640 Father Mersenne that «il y a eu icy un vieillard, lequel, après avoir demeuré la pluspart de sa vie en Calabre et en Sicile, s'estant retiré à Rome, a tasché d'y introduire, comme une belle et nouvelle invention, l'égalité des semitons en l'espinnette et a trouvé quelqu'un de nos Musiciens (tant sont ils ignorans) qui luy ont adjosté foy.» (There has been here an old man, who, after having lived most of his life in Calabria and Sicily, being retired to Rome, has tried to introduce, as a fine new invention, the equality of semitones on the spinet and has found some one of our musicians (so ignorant are they) to give him credit). qv. PATRIZIO BARBIERI, *Il Temperamento Equabile nel periodo Frescobaldiano*, in *Gerolamo Frescobaldi nel IV Centenario della nascita*, Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studi (Ferrara, 9-14 September 1983), Olschki, Firenze, 1986, p. 387ssq.; S. VARTOLO, *Gerolamo Frescobaldi: annotazioni sulla musica per strumento a tastiera*, in *Nuova Rivista Musicale Italiana*, IV, ERI, Torino, 1994, p. 658 ssq..

¹⁰«Daß er im Jahr 1747 Mitglied der von Mizler gestifteten Societät der musikalischen Wissenschaften wurde, würde kaum bemerkt zu werden verdienen [my bold type], wenn wir diesem Umstand nicht den vortrefflichen Choral: V o m H i m m e l h o c h etc. zu verdanken hätten. Er übergab diesen Choral der Societät bey seinem Eintritt in dieselbe, und ließ ihn nachher in Kupfer stechen.»

1. **J. S. Bach certainly held as an absolute priority the necessity that musical discourse should follow very precise syntactical and rhetorical rules.**

It is no accident that one of his employers praises the feverish and almost tentacular musical presence in all the sections of an orchestra or chorus directed by him in a footnote in his 1738 edition of Quintilian's *De Institutione Oratoria*. This is Johann Matthias Gesner, rector of the School of St Thomas in Leipzig from 1730 to 1734 and this was what he writes, in addition to praise in admiration of his keyboard ability: «[...] you ought to see him while [...] he sings not a single melody [...] but giving attention at the same time to thirty or even forty musicians [de xxx vel xxxx adeo symphoniacis], nodding to one with his head, to another tapping with his foot, giving another the rhythm and the beat with a warning finger, giving to one the high note, to the second the bass and to the third the middle [...] making clear with his voice all the others.»¹¹

This shows a definitely impetuous character, as his sons had found. I quote a scene reported by Christian Daniel Friedrich Schubart, worthy of the famous Max and Moritz drawn by Wilhelm Busch, with a J. S. Bach in nightshirt with a nightcap on his head:

*«I remember an anecdote recounted by the London Bach at Schwetzingen. Speaking of the greatness of his father he confessed to not always being up to playing what his father had written. Once, he told Cannabich and Wendling, I was improvising at the harpsichord quite mechanically and ended on a six-four chord. My father lay in bed and I thought he was asleep, but he jumped up, boxed my ears and resolved the six-four chord.»*¹²

The same character made him say of Carl Philipp Emanuel, according to Carl Friedrich Cramer in 1792/93: «*It is Prussian blue! It fades!*»¹³ and of the above-mentioned Johann Christian: «*My Christian is a foolish lad: he will certainly make his way in the world*»¹⁴ or to write in angry terms to an inn-keeper to whom he had lent or rented a harpsichord perhaps for a holiday, on 20th March 1738 (the eve of his birthday!): «*Herr Martius, my patience is at an end. How long do you think I will wait for the harpsichord?*»¹⁵, threatening to end their friendship, not to mention the youthful affair in which a sword was drawn and that Carl Philipp plays down in a letter to Forkel from Hamburg at the end of 1774¹⁶.

Such impulsiveness is reflected in the rhetoric of his musical conduct with an impetus that, in reference to the trinitarian *Prelude* (key signature of three flats) of Part III of the *Clavier Übung*, I should define as "pentecostal" (*Factus est repente de coelo sonus, tamquam advenientis spiritus vehementis*).

Turning to the Bachian syntax I cite in relation to Bach's attention to the good ordering of musical discourse another passage, contained in the impassioned defence of Bach in the face of Scheibe's accusations, written by the senior lecturer in rhetoric at the University of Leipzig, Johann Abraham Birnbaum and published in March 1739 in Mizler's Review:

*«[Bach] knows perfectly the parts that the elaboration of a musical work has in common with the art of rhetoric that not only are his reflections on the similarities and agreements of the two arts heard with infinite pleasure, but the wise application that he makes of them in his works again must be admired. His understanding of the poetic art is the best that can be required of a great composer. The Court Composer writes in a manner that is moving, expressive, natural, suitable, not according to a corrupt taste but according to the best»*¹⁷.

¹¹ BD II 432

¹² BD III 804

¹³ «[...] und wenn ihn jemand fragte: was er von Immanuel hielte? antwortete er: 's Berlinerblau! 's verschießt!'» BD III 973. The apparently cruel judgement Bach actually offered in consideration of the fact that, advancing in age and annoyed at not being understood by the public (*vor Verdruß vom Publico nicht verstanden zu seyn*), Emanuel had tended towards a certain easily popular galanterie (*zu einer gewissen leicht begreiflichen Popularität und Galanterie*). Berlin blue, also called Prussian or Paris blue, is a dark blue pigment used by painters and at one time also for technical drawings (it was also called engineers' blue) as well as for dyeing materials. It was discovered by chance in Berlin in 1704 by Diesbach and Dippel and commercialised by Milori from 1724; from the middle of the eighteenth century it was the blue pigment most used by artists until the discovery and diffusion of cobalt blue (1807). It is an iron ferrocyanide (Fe₄[Fe(CN)₆]₃) originally obtained using dried blood. It presents an intense blue colour cold in tone with a greenish sub-tone. **It changes easily through the effect of light and of alkaline substances.**

¹⁴ *ibid.* This opinion and the preceding were offered by Bach in old German dialect pronunciation (*in seinem hochdeutschen Mundartdialect: Mei Christian is e dummer Junge; darum macht e ooch noch gewiss emal sei Glück in der Welt*)

¹⁵ BD III p. 627 45c: «*Jezo vergeth mir das Geduld! Wie Lange glauben sie wohl das ich mit dem Clavesin warten soll?*»

¹⁶ BD III 801. This refers to a letter from C. Philipp to Forkel in which he records the youthful episode in his father's life: «*Man hat viele abentheuerliche Traditionen von ihm. Wenige davon mögen wahr seyn u. gehören unter seine jugendliche Fechterstreiche. Der seelige hat nie davon etwas wissen wollen, u. also lassen Sie diese comischen Dinge weg.*» (*There are many adventures told of him. Few of them are true and belong among his youthful fencing activities. My late father never wanted to know anything of it so do not mention these ridiculous stories*).

¹⁷ BD II 441. From Birnbaum's defence Bach's anger against Johann Adolph Scheibe, his former pupil, can be guessed. In particular Bach must have been greatly offended by the term *Musikant*. This appears clearly even in the first defence of Bach by the *dozent* in 1738 (BD II 409) on the offensive use of the term: «*so dass unter Musicanten und bierfiedlern fast kein unterschied ist*» (*so there is almost no difference between Musicanten and beer-fiddlers*). And again the rhetorician Birnbaum, whom I can imagine purple with indignation, in the defence cited above (BD II 441) points out how initially Scheibe, keeping for himself the qualification of *Musicus*, used that more contemptuous term *Musikant* for the *Hof-Compositeur* at the beginning of the notorious article of 14th May 1737 in the review edited by the same Scheibe *der Critische Musicus*. (BD II 400): «*Er [Scheibe] will ein Musikus seyn und heissen, der Herr Hofcompositeur und andere grosse Componisten*

können sich an dem Titel: Musikant, schon genügen lassen.» (*Scheibe wants to be and to be called Musicus while the Court Composer and other great composers can be satisfied with the title Musikant*). The reason for Scheibe's polemic (which fell on Bach's shoulders shortly after the unfortunate tirade of the Rector Ernesti in 1736, BD I 32, 33, 34, 35), as I have already partly anticipated, I believe can be in good part attributed to the resentment towards Bach of Scheibe's father, the organ-builder Johann Scheibe, who had to swallow various criticisms made by Bach, asked to give his opinion on his instruments with the impartial severity that, according to Carl Philipp, made organ-builders grow pale: «Noch nie hatjemand so scharf u. doch dabey aufrichtig Orgelproben übernommen. Den ganzen Orgelbau verstand er ist im höchsten Grade. Hatte ein Orgelbauer rechtschaffen gearbeitet, und Schaden bey seinem Bau, so bewegte er die Patronen zum Nachschuss. Das Registriren bey den Orgeln wuste niemand so gut, wie er. Oft erschracken die Organisten, wenn er auf ihren Orgeln spielen wollte, u. nach seiner Art die register anzog, indem sie glaubten es könnte unmöglich so, wie er wollte, gut klingen, hörten hernach aber hernach einen Effect, worüber sie erstaunten. Diese Wissenschaften sind mit ihm abgestorben. Das erste, was er bey einer Orgelprobe that, war dieses: Er sagte zum Spass, vor allen Dingen muss ich wissen, ob die Orgel eine gute Lunge hat, um dieses zu erforschen, zog er alles Klingende an, u. spielte so vollstimmig, als möglich. **Hier wurden die Orgelbauer oft für Schrecken ganz blass** [my bold type]. [...] Niemand konnte ihm seine Instrumente zu Dancke stimmen u. bekielen.» (*No-one examined organs more rigorously and yet so correctly. He understood the whole art of organ-building to the highest extent. If an organ-builder had worked honestly and suffered some loss, he would ask the patrons to give an extra contribution. No-one knew better than he the registration of the organ. He often shocked organists, if he wanted to play on their instruments and used registration that they believed to be impossible to sound well, as he wanted, and were time and again astonished at the effects he produced. This knowledge died with him. The first thing he did at an organ examination was this: he said in jest before everything else I must know whether the organ has good lungs and to test this he pulled out all the stops and played as polyphonically as possible. Here organ-builders often grew pale with terror.* [my bold type]. [...] *No-one could voice or quill his instruments to his satisfaction*). BD III 801. Scheibe père had not a few problems with the report of the examination on 17th December 1717 of the instrument of the Paulinerkirche in Leipzig. Bach pointed out a certain restriction of the structure that made it difficult to reach certain parts that, with time, might have to be repaired. Bach says, in any case, in the report that Herr Scheibe, who prepared the said organ, excused himself by saying that the organ was not originally made by him and that he had had to adapt himself to it as best he could and that further the space he had requested to install the structure more commodiously had not been granted (*Die ganzte Structur anlangend, ist freylich nicht zu läugnen, dass solche sehr enge gefast, und daher schwerlich iedem Stücke beyzukommen, so sich etwan mit der Zeit einiges zu repariren finden solte, solches excusiret nun Herr Scheibe als Verfertiger schon berührter Orgel damit, dass vors erste das Orgelgehäuse von ihme nicht verfertigt, und er also, so gut es immer sich hätte wollen thun lassen, mit dem Eingebäude nach selbigen sich richten müssen, vors andere man Ihme den noch verlangten Raum, um die Structur commodier einzurichten, gar nicht gestatten wollen*). Further [...] the wind would have to be made to come more equally to avoid uneven pressure ([...] *der Wind durchgehends aequaler gemacht werden muss, damit dem etwanigen Windstossen abgeholfen werden möge*). The criticisms continued also with regard to the inequality of intonation of the pipes that would have to be immediately corrected by the builder in such a way that lowest pipes in the Posaune and in the Bass Trumpet should not speak so horribly and harshly (*grass un blatterend*). Again: the mechanical transmission would have to be made lighter and the touch of the keys not so deep. In conclusion, however, Bach requested also a payment to the organ-builder who had constructed a new wind-chest beyond his contract, necessary to adjust the various deficiencies of the old one such as the short octave (BD I 87). Bach's impartiality, nevertheless, remained unchanged after the polemic of the younger Scheibe: at least on two other occasions in the 1740s he was to report on instruments by the elder Scheibe. The first occurred at the examination Bach made of the organ of the Leipzig Cemetery Church (where he was later buried). Of this test the report does not survive but we have the testimony of the Obituary (BD III 666). Strangely the name of the organ-builder is not given but only his advanced age is mentioned, noting that the examination was among the most rigorous that Bach had ever made (the bold type and underlining are mine): «Das letztere bewies er sonderlich, unter andern, einmal bey der Untersuchung einer neuen Orgel, in der Kirche, ohnweit welcher seine Gebeine nunmehr ruhen. Der Verfertiger dieses Werks war ein Mann, der in den letzten Jahren seines hohen Alters stand. **Die Untersuchung war vielleicht eine der schärfsten, die jemals angestellt worden.** Folglich gereichte der vollkommene Beyfall, den unser Bach über das Werck öffentlich erteilte, so wohl dem Orgelbauer, als auch **wegen gewisser Umstände**, Bachen selbst, zu nicht geringer Ehre.» (*The last examination, exceptional among others, was the examination of a new organ of the church not far from where his bones now rest. He who had carried out the work was in the last years of his long life. The test was perhaps one of the most careful that he had ever made. In consequence the absolutely positive judgement that our Bach gave publicly on the instrument resulted in no little honour to the organ-builder and to Bach himself, in spite of certain circumstances*). J. F. Agricola, co-author of the extended Obituary, specifies better in the notes and observations on the *Musica Mechanica Organoedi* of JAKOB ADLUNG, Birnstiel, Berlin, 1768, (BD III 740), the information about the name of the church where the organ was situated, giving information also of the collaboration with Bach of another person: «Diese letztere Orgel zu St. Johannis ist nach der strengsten Untersuchung, die vielleicht jemals über eine Orgel ergangen ist von dem Hrn. C. M. Joh. Seb. Bach und dem Hrn. Zacharias Hildebrand für untadelhaft erkannt worden.» (*This last organ in St John's underwent perhaps the most stringent examination ever given an organ and was declared flawless by Herr Kapellmeister J. S. Bach and Herr Zaccaria Hildebrandt*). An organ of Hildebrandt was in its turn examined by Bach together with Silbermann at Naumburg, with a report containing some reservations, 27th September 1746: cfr. BD II 547, 548, 549, 550, 550a, 551. Again on 7th August 1746, on the occasion of the examination of the small organ at Zschortau, the native region of the organ-builder Scheibe, who was to die two years later, in 1748, Bach praises the instrument *von Herrn Johann Scheiben aus Leipzig*, with the contract carefully observed and then, apart from some small defects that Herr Scheibe had immediately repaired on the occasion of the examination, the instrument has no serious fault (*ausser einigen kleinen Mängeln, denen jedoch Herr Scheibe bey der Probe in continenti abgeholfen, niergends ein Hauptdefect verhanden*) BD I 89. In the light of the documents I suppose, therefore, that behind the polemic of the younger Scheibe (29 at the time of the derogatory article) lies the father's resentment originating in the examination of 17th December 1717. On the other hand the reference to the organ at St John's in Leipzig in the *Obituary* would not otherwise be explained, nor the emphasis placed by Carl Philipp and Agricola on the *gewisser Umstände*, not otherwise specified, on the particular thoroughness of the examination as also on the honour Bach drew from this examination, implying almost certainly that, even if very accurate, this led the *Hof-Compositeur* to give a verdict generously and justly positive without acrimony. Besides, relations with organ-builders, in view of their sensitivity to criticism, were (and are) particularly difficult. It is valid what Agricola reports of Silbermann that he was piqued at Bach's criticisms of his pianofortes: «Er [Bach] hatte den Klang desselben [the pianofortes] gerühmet, ja bewundert: Aber dabey getadelt, dass es in der Höhe zu schwach lautete, und gar zu schwer zu spielen sey. Dieses hatte Hr. Silbermann, der gar keinen Tadel an seinen Ausarbeitungen leiden konnte, höchst übel aufgenommen. Er zürnte deswegen lange mit dem Hrn. Bach. Und dennoch sagte ihm sein Gewissen, dass Hr. Bach nicht unrecht hätte.» (*He [Bach], actually in admiration, had praised the tone [of the pianofortes]:*

Bach, in short, was conscious of the relations between rhetoric and music in the same way as Luzzasco Luzzaschi, who, in Book VI of his Madrigals of 1596 most probably suggests these words to Alessandro Guarini, author of the Preface: «*se il Poeta innalza lo stile solleva etiandio il musico il tuono. Piagne se il verso piagne, ride se ride, se corre se resta se priega se niega se grida se tace se vive se muore tutti questi affetti ed effetti così vivamente da lei vengono espressi che quella par quasi emulazione che propriamente rissomiglianza deve dirsi.*»¹⁸ ["If the poet elevates his style, so the musician raises his tone. He weeps, if the verse weeps, laughs if it laughs, if it runs, if it stays, it prays, if it denies, if it cries out, if it is silent, if it lives, if it dies, all these affects and effects are so vividly expressed that it should be called emulation rather than actually mere resemblance."]

In the light of what has been said above about the connection of Bach with the art of the sixteenth century, the closeness of Bach with an *ancient* composer is not casual or arbitrary. I take the occasion to note that as the *incipit* "Non sa che sia dolore chi dalla vita sua parte e non more" of a madrigal by Luzzaschi, among twelve published in 1601 on texts by Guarini, may be virtually identical with that of the Cantata in Italian (rare in Bach) BWV 209 for soprano and strings: "Non sa che sia dolore chi dall'amico suo parte e non more", a text that Schmieder conjectures as a suggestion of Gesner¹⁹.

Here is also something written to the ecclesiastical authority in Halle on 1st February 1746 by Johann Gotthilf Ziegler, pupil of the thirty-year-old Bach in Weimar around 1715: «*As far as concerns the performance of the chorales I learnt from my master, Kapellmeister Bach, who is still alive [Ziegler himself died the year after this] not simply to play the melody but to play according to the 'affect' of the words*»²⁰

Or Schubart, before 21st April 1779: «*The chorale must be composed not only according to artistic laws but also interpreted with strength and feeling according to the emotions that predominate there*»²¹

but then found fault in that it sounded too weak in the upper register and was too hard to play. Silbermann, who could stand no criticism of his work, took this badly. He was angry over this with Bach for a long time. And yet his conscience told him that Bach was not wrong.) BD III 743. On criticisms too on his judgement of tuning here is the testimony of Georg Andreas Sorge, organist/harpsichordist, who had dedicated in 1745 *Dem vortrefflichen teutschen Virtuosen Herrn Johann Sebastian Bach* [followed by the title of *Hof-Compositeur* etc [...] that we know] the *Drittes halbes Dutzend Sonatinen vors Clavier nach Italiänischen Gusto* with expressions of high esteem: «*Es werden sich vielleicht viele verwundern, dass mich der Kühnheit unterfangen, Ew: HochEdlen, als einen so grossen und Welt berühmten Virtuosen, und Fürsten der ClavierSpieler gegenwärtige Sonatinen zu dediciren*» (*There may perhaps be many who wonder that I have the boldness to dedicate to your most noble self, as a so great and world-famous virtuoso, and Prince of keyboard-playing, the present Sonatinas*) (BD II 526). And here are the words with which, certainly in agreement with Bach, in view of the great esteem he had for him, he criticizes in 1748 Silbermann's tuning (BD II 575): «*Es is genug, dass die Quinte gs:ds unleidlich über sich schwebet, welches keinesweges zu leugnen; und diese bezeuget gnugsam, dass die übrigen 11. wo nicht alle, jedoch die meisten zu viel abwärts schweben, welches so dann verursacht, dass 4. grosse Tertzen allzu rauh, scharff und barbarisch, und 3. kleine allzu weich, faul und träge werden. Mit einem Wort: Die Silbermannische Art zu temperiren, kann bey heutiger Praxi nicht bestehen. Dass dieses alles die lautere Wahrheit sey, ruffe ich unpartheyische und der Sache erfahrene Musicos, sonderlich den Welt-berühmten Hernn Bach in Leipzig zu zeugen*» (*It is enough that the fifth G flat - D flat is unbearably sharp, as cannot be denied, and this shows sufficiently that the other 11, if not all at least the greater part, are too low, making the four major thirds too rough, harsh and barbaric and the three minor too weak, slow and sluggish. In a word Silbermann's way of tuning cannot accord with modern practice. That all this is the real truth I call to witness a Musicus impartial and experienced in the matter, principally the world-famous Herr Bach in Leipzig.*)

A further cause of animosity on the part of Scheibe recorded by Forkel (in the biography cited, Chapter IV, p. 22) is to be found in the exclusion from the competition to succeed Christian Ludwig Boxberg as organist at St Peter's in Görlitz that took place in December 1729 at St Nicholas's in Leipzig (the post went to David Nicolai, father of Traugott, whom I shall cite later as a gifted lad, esteemed by Bach). Birnbaum refers to this in the defence quoted, accusing Scheibe of resentment against the *Hof-Compositeur* for having been judged by him unqualified for the position because he had not found the answer to a fugal subject, not knowing then how to develop it according to the rules. Scheibe hit back - BD II 446 - invoking in refutation the authority of Bach in terms that lead to the suspicion that he was well aware of the Kantor's resentment, recording that the latter was one of the judges of this *Organistenprobe* and that **if he had wanted** he would and could have borne witness according to knowledge and conscience (*wenn er nach Wissen und Gewissen urtheilen will und kann* [my bold type] *Dieser berühmte Mann war bey der damaligen Organistenprobe mit zum Richter ernennet*) and suggesting ironically that perhaps Birnbaum muddled him with another hero [*Marchand*] who had not wanted to use the theme proposed by Hof-Kapellmeister Bach and who played a theme he had chosen and who, when another theme was given him, finally disappeared from the scene (*Man muss mich aber nicht mit einem andern Helden verwechseln, der das vom Hn. Capellmeister Bach ihm vorgelegte Thema nicht spielen wollte, sondern statt dessen ein selbst beliebiges erwählte, und der, als ihm ein Thema aufgegeben ward, endlich gar unsichtbar geworden war*). Qv. also BD II 266 and 267 and Bach's letter to Nicolai BD I 21. It is worth recording that, a few months after the examination for the post to succeed Boxberg, Bach had in any case provided Scheibe, at the latter's request, with an introduction for the contest to succeed Elias Lindner at the organ of Freiberg Cathedral, BD I 68.

¹⁸ cf. S. VARTOLO, *Girolamo Frescobaldi*, cit., p. 624.

¹⁹ W. SCHMIEDER: *Thematisch-systematisches Verzeichnis der musicalischen Werke von Johann Sebastian Bach, Bach-Werke-Verzeichnis (BWV)*, Breitkopf & Härtel, Leipzig, 1966, p. 280. The Cantata, actually deemed spurious, is really a number of texts drawn from Guarini and Metastasio (*Galatea* and *Semiramide*).

²⁰ BD II 542: «*Was das Choral Spielen betrifft, so bin von meinem annoch lebenden Lehrmeister dem Herren Capellmeister Bach so unterrichtet worden: dass ich die Lieder nicht nur so oben hin, sondern nach dem Affect der Worte spiele.*»

²¹ BD III 837 This passage is taken from the autobiography of Christian Daniel Friedrich Schubart (1739-1791) whose adventurous life and *Sturm und Drang* style I have already mentioned. The passage, written during detention in the fortress at Hohenasperg, curiously mentions a little below the fact that «*Hierinnen sind die Katholiken bei weitem, wenigstens der Zahl, unsre Meister, nachdem wir unser grosses Muster, den unsterblichen Sebastian Bach, so weit aus den Augen verlieren, dass es kaum noch einen Menschen giebt, der seine Stücke spielen*

Or Agricola : «*The expression of the music in the chorale prelude must conform to the content of the song: this rule that has been stated and published by many writers and has happily been observed by many great composers, for example J. S. Bach*»²².

And to finish, a passage quoted from Forkel's biography at the end of Chapter III: «*In playing his own compositions he generally took a very lively tempo; but with this rapidity he knew how to introduce such variety into his playing that every piece under his hand seemed a true discourse. If he wanted to express strong emotions, he did this not as many others do who attack the keyboard with violence but through harmonic and melodic figures, that is through the inner resources of art*»²³.

And in the fifth chapter: «*Music was for him a language and the composer a true poet who must always have at his own disposition sufficient means of expression to depict the proper feelings in whatever language he pleased*»²⁴.

In the preface to the Inventionen and Sinfonie in two and three parts of 1723 Bach declares that they are useful «*principally to acquire a cantabile manner of playing*»²⁵.

As for J. S. Bach's manner of composition we have, always from the good C. Ph. E., writing to Forkel, a confirmation that, at least for keyboard compositions if not for all, Bach tested on the instruments the *playability* of what he had composed, a fundamental example for present composers who seldom know how to perform what they produce:

«*ad 7mum: if I exclude some (but nota bene not all) keyboard works, in particular those that take material from improvisation at the keyboard, he composed all the others without any instrument but later tried them out on the same instruments*»²⁶

a statement punctually repeated by Forkel in the same Chapter V: «*With such preparation he had no later need but for diligence and constant practice [...] finally to come to a point where he could create an artistic idea [...] He never left off this practice. He worked so continuously and with such assiduity that he often made use of the night: what he wrote in the day he learned to play at night*»²⁷.

and later related in Ernst Ludwig Gerber's *Historisch-Biographisches Lexicon*, (Breitkopf, Leipzig, 1790): «*Often, he said, it was necessary to use the night to resolve what had been written during the day. It is to be believed that he never had the habit of running to the harpsichord for help when he was composing*»²⁸.

Current numerology, that works so hard to find correspondences and combinations in his music, does not consider that his compositions are actually the fruit of an internal order of discourse that obeys a musical rhetoric, elaborated first of all at the writing-table, from which the admirable proportion of the various parts is derived.

2. Bach composed with total respect for the polyphonic tradition of the past

Carl Philipp's Obituary published in 1754 (but perhaps, as mentioned above, already prepared at the end of 1750²⁹) states that even when he was very young Bach copied by moonlight (*bey Mondenscheine*) music by Kerll, Froberger and Pachelbel jealously kept under key by his elder brother J. Christoph.³⁰ The excellent and worthy *Berlin Blue* in the letter to Forkel already cited writes: «*ad 2dum: further than Froberger, Kerll and Pachelbel he loved the works of Frescobaldi, Fischer, Kapellmeister at Baden, of Strunck, of some good old French composers, of Buxtehude, Reinken, Bruhns and Böehm, organist at Lüneburg*»³¹.

kann» (*Catholics, at least in number, far exceed our masters, after we have lost to sight our great example, the immortal Sebastian Bach, so that there is hardly anyone now who can play his pieces*).

²² BD III 764.

²³ J. N. FORKEL, [Über Johann Sebastian Bachs Leben, Kunst und Kunstwerke](#) cit., p. 18: «Bey der Ausführung seiner eigenen Stücke nahm er das Tempo gewöhnlich sehr lebhaft, wußte aber außer dieser Lebhaftigkeit noch so viele Mannigfaltigkeit in seinen Vortrag zu bringen, daß jedes Stück unter seiner Hand gleichsam wie eine Rede sprach. Wenn er starke Affekten ausdrücken wollte, that er es nicht wie manche andere durch eine übertriebene Gewalt des Anschlags, sondern durch harmonische und melodische Figuren, das heißt: durch innere Kunstmitte.»

²⁴ idem p. 24: «Er sah die Musik völlig als eine Sprache, und den Componisten als einen Dichter an, dem es, er dichte in welcher Sprache er wolle, nie an hinlänglichen Ausdrücken zur Darstellung seiner Gefühle fehlen dürfe.»

²⁵ BD I 153: «am allermeisten eine *cantabile* Art im Spielen zu erlangen».

²⁶ BD III 803: «ad 7mum: Wenn ich einige, NB nicht alle, Clavierarbeiten ausnehme, zumahl, wenn er den Stoff dazu aus dem Fantasiren auf dem Claviere hernahm, so hat er das übrige alles ohne Instrument componirt, jedoch nachher auf selbigem probirt.»

²⁷ J. N. FORKEL, [Über Johann Sebastian Bachs Leben, Kunst und Kunstwerke](#) cit., p.24: «So vorbereitet, bedurfte es nun nur Fleiß und ununterbrochene Übung, [...] und endlich auf einen Punkt zu kommen, auf welchem er sich nicht nur ein Kunst-Ideal erschaffen. [...]An dieser Übung ließ er es nie fehlen. Er arbeitete so anhaltend, und so emsig, daß er sogar häufig die Nächte zu Hülfe nahm. Was er am Tage geschrieben hatte, lernte er in der darauf folgenden Nacht spielen.»

²⁸ BD III 948: «denn oft, sagte er, habe er sich genöthiget gesehen, die Nacht zu Hülfe zu nehmen, um dasjenige herausbringen zu können, was er den Tag über geschrieben hätte. Es ist dies um desto eher zu glauben, da er nie gewohnt war bey dem Componiren sein Klavier, um Rath zu fragen».

²⁹ CHR. WOLFF, NBR, cit., p. 297 and BD III 637.

³⁰ BD III 666

³¹ BD III 803. Among the good old French composers were D'Anglebert, Raison, Boyvin, Couperin (qv. below).

This is absolutely evident in all his compositions, whether vocal or instrumental, and the very close relationship with Frescobaldi has already been seen above and I want here to underline these aspects.

1. The idea of *Clavierübung III* of 1739 we have seen above to retrace in concept the Italian organist tradition of the Organ Mass and in particular Frescobaldi's *Fiori Musicali*, very widely known in Germany from the year of publication 1635, of which Bach possessed as copy with his own signature, lost in the last world war³²: the final Fuga draws on the three-theme ricercare of the *Messa degli Apostoli* and the Kyrial theology is borrowed from the analogous versets of Frescobaldi³³.

If the first *Kyries* proclaim in both composers, Bach (*pedaliter e manualiter*) and Frescobaldi, the Father, the *Christes* are generally more merciful and human: in Frescobaldi's *Messa della Domenica* we see the first *Christe*, in which to the line of the tenor, mingling with the soprano and alto and finally the bass, is joined the melody of the first *Kyrie*, confirms the double nature of Christ. In the next *Christe* the alto theme is followed by the imploring *eleison* of tenor, soprano and bass, and finally of the alto itself. Then a firm note in the soprano affirms the unmoved divine eternity under which is added the melody of the first *Kyrie* in the alto, intercut with the *eleison* of the tenor and bass.

The last *Kyries* of the same *Messa della Domenica* of Frescobaldi express, recto and in contrary form, the omnipresent movement of the Paraclete who breathes "*ubi vult*", or else affirm the blessed eternity of the Christian *Trimurti* with the dominant fixedness of the dominant A with a ternary rhythm that underlines the eternal divine life (that the play on words serves to show sacred *madrigalismo*, become an artifice for the composer but also visual, in sound and implying theological concepts). By analogy the *Kyrie, Gott heiliger Geist* of the Kantor expresses the already indicated earth-moving epiphany of the Spirit with a thundering *Ricercare a 5 Cantus firmus im Bass cum Organo pleno* while the verse *manualiter* underlines with ternary motion the pressing urgency of the fiery Spirit that informs the whole universe. The sacred trinitarian dance of Frescobaldi finds in the final dance of jubilation of Bach's trithematic Fugue the exact conceptual correspondence.

2. The idea of ending, humorously and with self-irony, the *Goldberg Variations* with a *Quodlibet* is analogous to Frescobaldi's ending the *Fiori Musicali*, signed with two *Capricci*, one on the Bergamasque intersected by the *Ruggiero* and the other with a contrafaction of his own name, giving the theme of the *Girometta* (called by Frescobaldi *GiroLmeta* from his own name Girolamo). Now the genre of the *Quodlibet* came (according to Forkel who had it certainly from Carl Philipp) from the reunions that earlier members of the Bach family organized once a year to sing «*all together and without any preparation popular songs, the subjects of which were in part comic, in part in jest: the thing was nevertheless combined in such a way that the numerous airs improvised, as it were, should form a harmonious ensemble, though the words would be different in each part. They called such an improvised chorus Quodlibet which amused them and aroused heartfelt laughter among those who heard it*»³⁴.

This custom recalls the analogous devices of the motet and the caccia of the *Ars Nova*.

Certainly for his part Bach would be delighted to revive a family custom but nevertheless it remains incontrovertible that one of the meanings of *Quodlibet* is the term *Capriccio* and that one of the two popular themes used by Bach and by Frescobaldi coincide: that is the Bergamasca that for Bach is the song *Kraut und Rüben*.

3. The *old-fashioned* mentality of Bach, through Frescobaldi, is linked to his master Luzzaschi and in consequence to the venerated early Flemish/Italian composers (Adrian Willaert, Jakob Arcadelt and above all the "*divine*" Cipriano de Rore, Luzzaschi's master, who inherited from him a very pithy document containing "*le compositioni fatte prima da lui a mente*"³⁵). Hence the use of the score for polyphonic keyboard compositions, a Flemish bequest much used by the Neapolitans, persistently followed and recommended by Frescobaldi and that Bach adopts in his *Art of Fugue*.

³² K. BEISSWENGER, *Johann Sebastian Bachs Notenbibliothek*, Catalogus musicus, XIII, Bärenreiter, Kassel &c., 1992, p. 56, text and note 46.

³³ The following parallel between the Kyriale versets of Frescobaldi's *Fiori Musicali* and *Clavier Übung III* is discussed in my article: S. VARTOLO, *Girolamo Frescobaldi: annotazioni sulla musica per strumento a tastiera*, cit., pp. 646-650.

³⁴ JOHANN NIKOLAUS FORKEL, *Über Johann Sebastian Bachs Leben, Kunst und Kunstwerke*, Hoffmeister und Kühnel, Leipzig, 1802 (reprint: H. L. Grahl, Frankfurt am Main, 1950), pp. 3-4: «Sie sangen nehmlich nun Volkslieder, theils von possierlichem, theils auch von schlüpfrigem Inhalt zugleich mit einander aus dem Stegreif so, daß zwar die verschiedenen *extemporirten* Stimmen eine Art von Harmonie ausmachten, die Texte aber in jeder Stimme andern Inhalts waren. Sie nannten diese Art von extemporirter Zusammenstimmung *Quodlibet*, und konnten nicht nur selbst recht von ganzem Herzen dabey lachen, sondern erregten auch ein eben so herzliches und unwiderstehliches Lachen bey jedem, der sie hörte».

³⁵ qv. preface of ADRIANO CAVICCHI, p. 7 in LUZZASCO LUZZASCHI, *Madrigali per cantare e sonare a uno, due e tre soprani (1601)*, L'Organo-Brescia, Bärenreiter-Kassel, 1965. Qv. also my article S. VARTOLO, *Girolamo Frescobaldi*, cit., in which I note the close dependence of Frescobaldi's Toccatas on this collection of Madrigals and my recording of the complete Madrigals: L. LUZZASCHI, *Concerto delle Dame di Ferrara*, Harmonia Mundi, HMA 1951136.

Bach held the works of François Couperin and almost certainly of Domenico Scarlatti in the highest esteem. From the former he also transcribed for organ an aria from *Les Nations*, a rondo from Book II of the *Pièces de Clavecin*, *Les Bergeries*, drawn from the *VI Ordre* for Book II (1725) of Anna Magdalena (in which, furthermore, is the opening aria of the *Goldberg Variations*, the insertion of which nevertheless, recent studies have established, happened probably about 1740 directly from the autograph of the *Goldberg*.) Actually the series of the *30 Goldberg Variations*, a seeming anomaly in respect of Bach's usual harpsichord practice, has a direct relationship with the *30 Sonate* of Domenico Scarlatti's *Essercizi*, the publication of which was certainly widespread and that Bach would have been able to see: he was in fact well informed thanks to his visits to Dresden, where Zelenka, for example, had a well-stocked library³⁶, but also thanks to the continual visits he received and that kept him up to date with the news. Again the fine, good, diligent second son, with his human and musical *Empfindsamkeit*, tells us, in his *Autobiography* of 1774 that:

«For composition and the keyboard I had no other masters than my father [...] I always remained in Germany and only made some journeys in my fatherland [here the contrast with the more fortunate and worldly Harrer, Marpurg, Mattheson etc... is touching]. This lack of foreign travel would have been more damaging to my métier if I had not had from my youth the particular good fortune to hear at home the best of all kinds of music, to know many masters of the first importance and to obtain in part their friendship. In my youth I had already this advantage in Leipzig, since it was not easy for a master of music travelling in this district not to meet my father and be heard by him. The greatness of my father in composition, in organ and harpsichord playing, which was special to him, was too well known for a Musicus of standing to miss the chance of meeting this great man, if possible.»³⁷

I have already suggested above how the *Goldberg Variations* came about in answer to Scheibe's criticisms, with accusations against the Kantor of obscurity, lack of melody and natural grace. It is, therefore, useful to consider this cycle.

* The title is already extremely informative:

CLAVIER ÜBUNG / BESTEHEND / IN EINER / ARIA / MIT VERSCHIEDENEN VERÄNDERUNGEN / VORS CLAVICIMBAL / MIT 2 MANUALEN. /
DENEN LIEBHABERN ZUR GEMÜTHS- / ERGETZUNG VERFERTIGET VON / JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH / KÖNIGLICH POHLNISCHEN U.
CHURFÜRSTLICH SÄCHSISCHEN HOFF- / COMPOSITEUR, CAPELLMEISTER, U. DIRECTORE / CHORI MUSICI IN LEIPZIG. / NÜRNBERG IN
VERLEGUNG / BALTHASAR SCHMIDS.

(Keyboard exercises consisting of an aria with different variations for harpsichord with two manuals. Prepared for the delight of the spirit for music-lovers by Johann Sebastian Bach Royal Polish and Saxon Electoral Court Composer, Kapellmeister, and Director of Choral Music in Leipzig. Published in Nuremberg by Balthasar Schmid.)

³⁶ For books owned by Bach see: KIRSTEN BEISSWENGER: *Johann Sebastian Bachs Notenbibliothek*, cit. It is possible that Zelenka too, who among others in Vienna met Fux, possessed Frescobaldi's *Capricci*, bought or copied of course in Venice, where he knew Lotti. He certainly had a copy of the *Fiori Musicali* (and also of Battiferri's *Ricercari*): qv. FR. W. RIEDEL: *Quellenkundliche Beiträge zur Geschichte der Musik für Tasteninstrumente in der zweiten Hälfte des 17. Jahrhunderts*, Bärenreiter, Kassel, 1960, p. 55, note 66).

³⁷ BD III 779: «In der Komposition und im Clavierspielen habe ich nie einen andern Lehrmeister gehabt, als meinen Vater[...]Ich bin also beständig in Deutschland geblieben und habe nur in diesem meinem Vaterlande einige Reisen gethan. Dieser Mangel an auswärtigen Reisen wurde mir bey meinem *Metier* mehr schädlich gewesen seyn, wenn ich nicht von Jugend an das besondere Glück gehabt hätte, in der Nähe das Vortreflichste von aller Art von Musik zu hören und sehr viele Bekanntschaften mit Meistern vom ersten Range zu machen, und zum Theil ihre Freundschaft zu erhalten. In meiner Jugend hatte ich diesen Vortheil schon in Leipzig, denn es reisete nicht leicht ein Meister in der Musik durch diesen Ort, ohne meinen Vater kennen zu lernen und sich vor ihm hören zu lassen. Die Grösse dieses meines Vaters in der Komposition, im Orgel und Clavierspielen, welche ihm eigen war, war viel zu bekannt, als dass ein Musikus vom Ansehen, die Gelegenheit, wenn es nur möglich war, hätte vorbeylessen sollen, diesen grossen Mann näher kennen zu lernen.»



- * The frontispiece lacks a date but 1741 is the year generally attributed to the publication.
- * The term *Übung* cannot but recall, in the specific case of the form and keyboard technique employed in the *Goldberg Variations*, the *Essercizi per gravicembalo*³⁸ of Domenico Scarlatti published in London in 1738, which Bach, always up to date with new things in music, probably knew. In fact the Variations in their bipartite scheme can be equated with Scarlatti's *Sonate* that in this collection also number thirty. As Forkel notes, the variation had not up to then been a genre favoured by Bach, in whose keyboard works, moreover, crossing of hands rarely appears, while common in both the *Goldberg Variations* and Scarlatti's *Essercizi*. An anecdote reports that later this device was used less frequently by Scarlatti in view of increasing corpulence: the corpulent Bach of Haussmann's portrait would then be shown very agile also in his maturity!
- * The intended instrument is clear: harpsichord with two manuals. Here I cannot avoid some reflections. Pianists have taken possession of the *Goldberg Variations*, that, a very rare example in the work of Bach, are exclusively for two manuals, as the frontispiece declares. This forcible appropriation is so firmly entrenched that concert societies far prefer performance by a pianist than by a harpsichordist.

The opposition of harpsichord and piano would in fact not exist if there had been a proper and necessary keyboard training that might create a deeper understanding of the techniques of the various instruments. Until organists and above all pianists who have not experienced in the course of their basic technical training such an instrument dedicate themselves to the harpsichord (to which they return motivated principally by the cultural desire to widen their own knowledge and sometimes through frustration at not being able to develop a physically demanding concert career on the piano, sometimes through smallness of hands: in this abandonment of the great piano family like the younger members of distinguished stock at one time obliged to embark on an ecclesiastical career without the so-called *vocation*) and as long as great artistic personalities do not dedicate themselves to the harpsichord and its literature is swallowed up by the false pseudo-*rococo* assumption of insubstantiality and inconsistency summarily defined as *baroque*, this remains at the margins of aesthetic comprehension.³⁹

³⁸ The parallel between the *Goldberg* and the *Essercizi* was made by me in 1985, at a symposium in Nice for the centenary of the birth of Domenico Scarlatti.

³⁹ Ralph Kirkpatrick in his still unmatched book on Domenico Scarlatti (R. KIRKPATRICK: *Domenico Scarlatti*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J., 1953, p. 280) reveals a scheme of performance still partly used today by pianists: « [...] few Scarlatti pieces, or a little Couperin on the part of the more adventurous, a Mozart sonata or a Bach organ fugue were served up as well-styled appetizers to be unregretted by late-comers and to act as finger warmers and curtain raisers to the "really expressive" music of the nineteenth century.» A worse service is done our composer, cited hurriedly with a 'primitive' connotation of eighteenth-century lightness that I would not hesitate to define as Hollywoodiana: the pianist dons a wig and powder flirting affectedly with the audience before launching himself into the resounding whirlpools of 'serious' music.

This is a characteristic of the lack of breadth typical of a relevant part of our musical culture that, as far as regards piano teaching, is fixed on myths and styles that are irremovable, in a way that is for now unavoidable. On the other hand a more critical rereading of the text and of Scarlatti's instrument has produced a similar mental rigidity, often on a pattern more scientific than musical. The second tendency has come about in reaction to the first, in an opposite course under the heading of wider diffusion: in the Baroque period from Italy to the rest of Europe, later in full nostalgia in consequence of a period of nineteenth-century rejection towards what was generally Italian, dictated by nationalistic resentments which I have pointed out (in fact in the best part justified if the case of Bach is considered).

The phenomenon nevertheless lends itself to rather useful and curious consideration. It is indubitable that the interest with regard to musical production up to the Baroque has seen German musicology in the front line, the positivist mould of which was preceded by a series of aesthetic phenomena turning back to the past (neo-classicism, the Nazarenes, Neo-Gothicism ...) that have brought about many very serious artistic blunders, such as, for example, reconstructions in false style and destructive 'restorations' to which Italy has actually remained virtually immune. The result is before everyone's eyes: with respect to the North, Southern Europe, from the point of view of the conservation of monuments, is indisputably more authentic, if also the wish after the last war to protect the national artistic inheritance is

* The usual formula of Bach employed in the preceding cycles of the *Clavier Übung «Denen Liebhabern zur Gemüths Ergetzung verfertigt von J. S. B.»* sounds here particularly adapted to the refutation of the criticisms of Scheibe's article

there much less widely diffused, a fact due to lack of culture but likewise to northern aesthetics, spread fortunately belatedly but for the same reason slower to dispel (not to speak of the culture of cement that has fascinated architects and hosts of surveyors in a destruction of the landscape based on models that are purely utilitarian and based on American consumerism). Enough to think how many historic organs no longer exist or have been 'modernised' in Northern Europe, in spite of the actual enthusiasm for conservation and reconstruction, too often scientific and rarely based on craftsmanship in the full sense.

In the field of music discrimination is less 'geographical': yet with a greater sensibility in Northern Europe towards the past that often is identified in ways and interpretative fashions that are disputable and snobbishly *exclusive*, the recovery of an attention to historical data is everywhere again in second place, particularly on the part of official institutions, which brings about results that make survival difficult. It is proper to add that one who is motivated by musicological intentions is too often diffident towards that freedom of interpretation that is not clearly dictated by a codified and documented procedure, while, on the other side, to limit it to keyboard instruments, the greatest pianists provide readings absolutely inadequate because they refuse through uncritical education, if not absolutely through arrogant resentment, a reading that springs from historically adequate stylistic research. The danger then is that of not falling into the Charybdis of aseptic and finally anti-musical performance (as common with many organists too often brought to a cold performance of Bach, often considering earlier music *primitive*) after having escaped the Scylla of pure lack of critical discernment, in a fundamentally *romantic* mentality that exalts the myth of absolute genius, free from conditions. I shall not speak here of the approach to historical methodology on the part of those first formed with an uncritical education, that in the first instance assumes the traits of inflexibility typical of neophytes nor shall I draw attention to the incredible phenomenon of conductors who for years championed the exclusive use of original instruments, whether with articles and books, with performances resulting in lamentable intonation and technique to which many recordings bear witness, and that now are champions, for obvious financial reasons, of a quite different repertoire.

The exploitation of the whole musical heritage, that is revealed as the true new phenomenon in a historical development that has always considered out of date what has been produced before, modifying and destroying it, has up to now assumed for many performers the connotation of a cultural revanchism and generally of an interest for 'primitive' forms of purely historical value, such as ought to be left to 'specialists' or to pianists 'manqués' or with small hands and then 'harpsichordistic'. The two rocks at the ends of the aesthetic evaluation are not then so dissimilar.

The correct attitude should also in this case be in the middle: contrary to what appears in Catholic moral philosophy (SANCTI THOMAE DE AQUINO *Summa Theologiae prima pars secundae partis, Quaestio LXXVI, articulus 1: Ad primum sic proceditur. Videtur quod ignorantia non possit esse causa peccati*), ignorance of the matter (in this case of documentary elements) does not avoid sin but makes it the greater. On the other hand one with deep experience of critical reading attests how often a document reflects a mentality and practice not universally valid: the integration of sources apparently or sometimes substantially divergent makes therefore necessary a certain caution in which the 'irrational' component of interpretation (employed however in accordance with the taste and style) becomes the factor that makes the difference.

I was struck years ago by the concert of an artist who played a whole programme of Scarlatti, partly on the harpsichord, partly on the piano. To the expressive piano interpretation there was, on the harpsichord, a corresponding unendurable dryness. Such a phenomenon stemmed from the absolute impossibility of transferring to the harpsichord the equivalent of the piano and forte that in the course of centuries has always been the desire of the keyboard-player (even the Ferrara Concerto delle Dame in the last quarter of the sixteenth century used for preference a mysterious keyboard instrument with piano and forte - a clavichord? - together with the 'great' lute played by Luzzaschi and Fiorini while the ladies accompanied themselves with the harp, the viola da gamba and the lute!) and that once combined satisfactorily from the point of view of intensity of sound, thanks to the escapement, had made fall into disuse an instrument certainly 'defective' in expression, as was the harpsichord, or inadequate with regard to the intensity of sound, as was the clavichord, on which there is possible, however, a kind of vibrato - *Bebung* - unknown to other keyboard instruments.

The feeling of piano and forte on the harpsichord is artificially determined by *rubato* touch, to use a pianistic term that the principal theorist of harpsichord aesthetic, François Couperin, identifies in two procedures that he calls "aspiration" and "suspension". Another most important element is the rhythm, the intelligent handling of which creates that sensation of crescendo and diminuendo that in fact the harpsichord does not possess and in the absence of which otherwise there is produced an unendurable impression of dryness in performance. Such an illusion is like the optical effect, the phenomenon known to psychologists as the *effet Kanizsa*, through which characters or drawings assume their completeness and their depth only thanks to the integrative action of the brain, from intuition and human imagination that from antiquity that brought together distant stars far apart with imaginary lines to form the signs of the zodiac. The concept is well expressed by Couperin (qv. note 47): «[...] la suspension de ceux [sounds] du clavecin semble (par un effet contraire) retracer à l'oreille la chose souhaitée». For this reason the 'historical' attempt by pianists to reproduce a *harpsichord* sound (leading sometimes to the addition of metal ends to the hammers!) enhancing the characteristics that are negative from the point of view of expression and the metallic element of the sound, offers a dry staccato, a 'gymnastic' rhythm and the elimination of the pedal, is absolutely in contrast with what is eagerly sought on the harpsichord, where the notes are held beyond their real value in the attempt to fill out the duration, and this not only between consonant notes but also adjacent notes. In this, for example, the excellent piano-playing of Glenn Gould, so imitated and also praised, or perhaps principally for his maniacal brilliance with the media that so pleased the wider public, does not justify the interpretation on the piano of a repertoire that, even though rendered with an admirable touch from the technical point of view, becomes totally altered in tempo and in rhythm, with vertiginously rapid performance or playing slowed down in irritating fashion, arbitrarily enhancing melo lines rather than others. This very great technician in fact becomes absolutely unlistenable to in the rare harpsichord and organ recordings for the reasons indicated above. Bach in particular is so rooted in the tradition that precedes him and so dedicated to the service of the next that the conflict with one who ignores completely musical tradition that has gone before and wants to put in first place only his own personality is absolutely ruinous.

This totally misleading aesthetic cannot be sufficiently deplored when applied to the *Goldberg Variations*, where, apart from the expressive factor, the technical function of a cycle exclusively conceived for two manuals becomes totally subverted. It is necessary to make radical changes to the structure for the interpretation on the modern piano of harpsichord repertoire, although with great fascination when this is realised by a great performer: in this case Scarlatti takes on a light character that does not do justice to the reserved and profound genius of this modest southerner whose vein of melancholy, so well underlined in the Portuguese portrait that shows his elegant aristocratic features, is enhanced by its intermixture with the austere spirit of Spain.

of 14th May 1737⁴⁰ that accused the *Vornehmste unter den Musicanten* of obscuring natural grace *durch allzugrosse Kunst*.

- * The title of *Hoff-Compositeur* of the Court of Dresden, which from 19th November 1736 Bach proudly boasted, starting with *Clavier Übung III*, assumes here, as I shall say below, the character of homage and acknowledgement, and then of a sincere and friendly dedication to Count von Keyserling, who had expedited the matter. Such a title, like empty useless tinsel, is totally forgotten in the *Art of Fugue* by Bach's heirs who record only the Kantor's position (*ehemahliger Capellmeister und Musikdirector*) in Leipzig. This suggests a title for the cycle that can with difficulty be shown to stem from Bach himself.
- * The word *Directore* is correctly given in Latin the ablative of the agent: *verfertigt von J. S. B [...] Directore Chori Musici in Leipzig*.
- * Balthasar Schmid was also editor of another cycle of variations, the *Einige kanonische Veränderungen* BWV 769, in a certain sense the sacred equivalent of the *Goldberg Variations*. For him were probably intended the *Canone* BWV 1078, *Canon super Fa Mi, a 7. post Tempus Musicum. Fa Mi, et Mi Fa est tota Musica*. His name that is synonymous with smith, FABER, is concealed under the notes E and F that in solmization are also respectively La and Si. Then **F, A, B, E R** is also given in the acrostic: Domine Possessor Fidelis Amici Beatum Esse Recordari, tibi haud ignotum: itaque Bonae Artis Cultorem Habeas verum amicum Tuum (FABER BACH I[SENACO] T[URINGUM]: *composer Bach of Eisenach in Thuringia*) Leipzig 1st March 1749.
- * The heading of the *Goldberg Variations* can confirm in part the circumstance referred to by Forkel, a story that would be difficult to invent completely, in view of the care with which he collected and solicited information from Carl Philipp and from Friedemann.

Let us read what Forkel says: «*This wonderful work consists of 30 variations framed by canons in all intervals and kinds, from the unison to the ninth with the most intelligible and flowing melody. There is a regular fugue in four voices and other very brilliant variations for two manuals and finally a Quodlibet, as he called it and that would suffice alone to make its composer immortal, although it does not hold the first place in this work. Such variations are a model for all variations, although, understandably, no-one has attempted this. We must be grateful to Count Keiserling, former Russian ambassador at the Electoral Court of Saxony, who often stayed in Leipzig and brought with him Goldberg, whom we have above mentioned as a pupil of Bach. The count was ill and suffered from insomnia. At the time Goldberg lived in the ambassador's house, sleeping in an adjacent room, ready to play something if the count could not sleep. One day the count told Bach that he should like to have some keyboard pieces for his Goldberg, calm and rather cheerful in character to relieve him during his sleeplessness. Bach thought that the genre of Variations could best fulfil this request, which until then he had thought a thankless task because of the constantly similar basic harmony. But as all his work at this time became a masterpiece, so were these variations that he wrote. He also left only a single example of this kind. The count thereafter called them his variations. He could not hear enough of them and during his long wakeful nights he would say: Dear Goldberg, please play me one of my variations. Bach was perhaps never so well paid for his works as for these. The count made him the present of a gold beaker which he filled with 100 louis d'or. But the value of this work of art could not be paid if the gift were a thousand-fold. It must be noted that in the printed edition of these variations there are some important mistakes that the composer took the care to correct in his own copy.* [my bold type]»⁴¹.

⁴⁰ BD II 400

⁴¹ J. N. FORKEL, *Über Johann Sebastian Bachs Leben, Kunst und Kunstwerke* cit., pp. 51-52: «Dieß bewundernswürdige Werk besteht aus 30 Veränderungen, worunter Canones in allen Intervallen und Bewegungen vom Einklang bis zur None mit dem faßlichsten und fließendsten Gesange vorkommen. Auch ist eine reguläre 4stimmige Fuge, und außer vielen andern höchst glänzenden Variationen für 2 Claviere, zuletzt noch ein sogenanntes *Quodlibet* darin enthalten, welches schon allein seinen Meister unsterblich machen könnte, ob es gleich hier bey weitem noch nicht die erste Partie ist. Dieses Modell, nach welchem alle Variationen gemacht werden sollten, obgleich aus begreiflichen Ursachen noch keine einzige darnach gemacht worden ist, haben wir der Veranlassung des ehemaligen Russischen Gesandten am Chursächs. Hofe, des Grafen K a i s e r l i n g zu danken, welcher sich oft in Leipzig aufhielt, und den schon genannten G o l d b e r g mit dahin brachte, um ihn von B a c h in der Musik unterrichten zu lassen. Der Graf kränkelte viel und hatte dann schlaflose Nächte. G o l d b e r g, der bey ihm im Hause wohnte, mußte in solchen Zeiten in einem Nebenzimmer die Nacht zubringen, um ihm während der Schlaflosigkeit etwas vorzuspielen. Einst äußerte der Graf gegen B a c h, daß er gern einige Clavierstücke für seinen G o l d b e r g haben möchte, die so sanften und etwas muntern Charakters wären, daß er dadurch in seinen schlaflosen Nächten ein wenig aufgeheitert werden könnte. B a c h glaubte, diesen Wunsch am besten durch Variationen erfüllen zu können, die er bisher, der stets gleichen Grundharmonie wegen, für eine undankbare Arbeit gehalten hatte. Aber so wie um diese Zeit alle seine Werke schon Kunstmuster waren, so wurden auch diese Variationen unter seiner Hand dazu. Auch hat er nur ein einziges Muster dieser Art geliefert. Der Graf nannte sie hernach nur s e i n e Variationen. Er konnte sich nicht satt daran hören, und lange Zeit hindurch hieß es nun, wenn schlaflose Nächte kamen: Lieber Goldberg, spiele mir doch eine von meinen Variationen. Bach ist vielleicht nie für eine seiner Arbeiten so belohnt worden, wie für diese. Der Graf machte ihm ein Geschenk mit einem goldenen Becher, welcher mit 100 Louis d'or angefüllt war. Allein ihr Kunstwerth ist dennoch, wenn das Geschenk auch tausend Mahl größer gewesen wäre, damit noch nicht bezahlt. Noch muß bemerkt werden, daß in der gestochenen Ausgabe dieser Variationen einige bedeutende Fehler der findlich sind, die der Verf. in seinem Exemplar sorgfältig verbessert hat.» Strangely there comes to my mind Mattheson's reference to the *Art of Fugue* in which, in note 4, he talks precisely of *Louis d'or*: «Wie wäre es denn, wenn ein jeder Aus – und Einländer an diese Seltenheit seinen *Louis d'or* wagte?» (*How would it be, then, if everyone, foreigner - and German, risked his Louis d'or for this rarity?*). One Louis d'or was equal to the five thalers that we have seen to be the price fixed in the notice of 1st June 1751 for a copy of the *KdF*: I notice that in the announcement of sale of the copper plates by Carl Philipp on 14th

The anecdote, contrary to the statements of supercilious Bach scholars, scandalized at the undignified nature of what they call a story, bears all the character of truth and was certainly recounted directly by Carl Philipp as a private confidence that only the relative distance of time allowed him finally to reveal.

The work in fact has no dedication and is supposed to have been composed in 1741. The therapeutic function justifies in good part such a modest omission. Yet the title of *Bach composer of the King of Poland and the Elector of Saxony* takes its place.

In fact Count Keyserling himself had procured and then conferred the position on Bach. Actually the decree of the title conferred on 19th November 1736 in Dresden by King August of Saxony⁴² was originally transmitted on the 28th of the same month by *Monsieur le Baron von Kayserling (Den 28. ejusd. ist das Orig. S^f Exc. dem Herr Bar. von Keyserling zugestellet worden)* who bestowed it solemnly on Bach on 1st December, after the inauguration of the organ at the Frauenkirche in Dresden⁴³. The Baron became Count at the end of 1741, while Bach, with his cousin Johann Elias, was staying with him. The same Count was certainly present in Berlin, where he was ambassador from 1746 to 1748, during the visit of Bach to Friedrich II of Prussia and was godfather of Carl Philipp's younger son. Wilhelm Friedemann dedicated a sonata to him.

The arguments adopted to deny the story, that among other things has recent very exact confirmation in the already mentioned rediscovery of Bach's copy personally corrected by him and further enriched by fourteen new canons, are based on the supposed impossibility for a young harpsichordist like Goldberg to play it and to the failure to find again the golden beaker. It could be that the unique emphasis on this last could refer to one of those indicated in Chapter 5⁴⁴ of the inventory but perhaps that matters little.

At the same time the young age (15) of Goldberg is not so serious an impediment: born in 1727 in Danzig, he studied in Dresden with Wilhelm Friedemann and with Johann Sebastian himself and was from 1742 in the service of the Count. He was then in the service of the Kapelle of Count von Brühl, prime minister of Saxony, and died quite young in Dresden in 1756. For the rest we have the testimony in the *Obituary* of David Traugott Nicolai that:

«by the age of nine he played Bach's most difficult works with extraordinary success, the reason for the admiration of this very talented young man on the part of patrons and music-lovers: the great Bach in person expressed the desire to see him in Leipzig and to hear him play, but died before that could happen»⁴⁵.

This detail is perhaps incorrect in that very probably Bach had him as a pupil in Leipzig, where the boy, born in 1733, studied.

But after all was there not an absolute and very precocious genius born in 1756? And further again in Cramer's *Magazin der Musik* there appeared on 2nd March 1783 news of a certain «*Ludwig van Beethoven son of the tenor mentioned above, a boy of 11 [in fact 13] and with a talent that promises much. He plays the harpsichord with great mastery and energy, sight-reads very well and altogether plays mainly J.S. Bach's Well-Tempered Clavier that Herr Neefe has put in front of him. Whoever knows this collection of Preludes and Fugues through all keys (which could almost be called the non plus ultra) will know what this means*»⁴⁶. There is similar admiration for a young organist and harpsichordist, Wilhelm Christoph Bernhard, who is mentioned several times by Cramer and Forkel, among others, as a virtuoso who applied himself from his early years to the study of J. S. Bach's music.⁴⁷

The cycle of variations, moreover, framed with absolute order and admirable proportion, is nevertheless musically quite different from the usual Bach manner: the theme in the first place is partly analogous to the chorale *Von Himmel hoch*, used too by Bach a little later as the basis of *Einige kanonische Veränderungen* BWV 769, and lends itself to a clear development and is in line with the presumed request of Keyserling for music of serene and calm character. In its apparently anomalous place with regard to Bach's works (but I have already mentioned the fact that really the decade 1740-1750 is under the banner of the Variation) the cycle finds its justification as a form of discourse based on a very high level of intellectuality, managed, however, with wise and graceful humour.

The variations are a return by Bach to a youthful style and are handled descriptively, managed on the line of evening illuminist conversation in the first part, with alternations of melancholy sensibility and allegro virtuosity. In the second, through an Overture in French style (and who better than the diplomat Keyserling, the work's beneficiary, could appreciate such a form?) and flashes of virtuoso humour (*Variation 23* in particular is a true and proper jest) we are introduced into the private chamber of the Count, seated on the bed now in nightshirt and with a nightcap on, where, with pastoral motion but in canon to

September (qv. note 44), actually unlike the announcement, whether in the number of plates, about sixty, or in the price, four thalers (perhaps a reduction for sales purposes), in thirty copies the number of copies printed is indicated.

The earlier version of such *music therapy* was used by Farinelli, to soothe the pain of Philipp V of Spain, every night from 25th August 1737 to 9th July 1746 – date of the king's death – by singing some arias, perhaps always the same ones, but always varied, a custom that perhaps aroused the *vanitas* of the Count to emulation and that musicological seriousness rejects without appeal as unworthy of such a great work.

⁴² BD II 388

⁴³ BD II 389: the occasion in a certain sense would have connection with the *sacred* character (unlike the two preceding collections and the *Goldberg*) of *Clavier Übung III*, that carries for the first time the title obtained through the good offices of Keyserling.

⁴⁴ BD II 627: «Cap. V: An Silber-Geräthe und andern Kostbarkeiten: 1. dito gestochen 12. Lt. a. 13 gr rthl. 6 gr. 12 [aforementioned (a cup) engraved, referring to the cups or beakers mentioned immediately before]».

⁴⁵ BD II 1042. See reference in note 17 with regard to the boy's father.

⁴⁶ BD III 874; besides in BD III 950: «Bethoven (Louis van) Sohn des Tenoristen in der Chrurf. Kapelle zu Bonn; geb. daselbest 1772, ein Schüler von Neefe; spielte schon in seinem 11ten Jahre das wohltemperirte Klavier von Sebastian Bach».

⁴⁷ BD III 857, 874, 883, 932, 950.

maintain the high technical structure (*canone all'ottava 24*), there resounds a *gute nacht* that invites to deep sleep, symbolized by the very low G that strangely appears only here in the whole cycle. The following variation, Landowska's 'black pearl', tucking in the coverings, touches all the sensibilities of the Count's versatile and cosmopolitan soul, thanks to the structure exemplified in the aria in the Italian style (but how chromatically elaborated!). The following sarabande, gracefully sustained with ornaments and turns, and the rarefied *Canon 27*, always in pastoral rhythm, in which the reduction to two voices, far from being synonymous with speed, here pretends now not to tire the mind further, introduce the true and proper sleep of the Count, in the silence broken only by the mechanism of the clocks, so dear to the love of automata of eighteenth-century mentality (*Variation 28*). Here the song of a gentle carillon, disturbed at the end by a light chromatic *cauchemar*, is accompanied by the *tick-tock* of the clocks that only an aseptic vision can conceive as a mere *Übung*, stolid *applicatio* of double trills, foolish exhibitionism for the performer. It would seem almost an explicit request of this presumably embarrassed client to go back to the descriptive French genres such as those of François Couperin's *Reveil-matin* or *Tic-toc-choc*⁴⁸. Other carillons sound out in the *Cantata Liebster Gott* BWV 8 (performed in 1724 but again in the years 1746-47 in Leipzig) and in the spurious BWV 53 *Schlage doch*. The omitted dedication (as we have seen, nevertheless, cryptically implied in the display of the title obtained thanks to Keyserling) as I have said can be determined either by analogy with the preceding three collections, dedicated to music-lovers, as also from an understandable restraint through the most personal and therapeutic use of the cycle by the Count, who nevertheless, unlike the behaviour of the very reserved Duke Alfonso II d'Este with regard to Luzzaschi and his Concerto di Dame at the end of 1500, would have allowed such an absolute masterpiece to see the light of day in print. A final element of correspondence with Forkel's story is given, as I have already said and here confirm, in the relatively recent rediscovery of Bach's own personal copy, with his corrections, supplied with 14 (again a Bach number) autograph canons, these devised with the utmost ingenuity. To conclude the circle of initial reasoning, the canons of the *Goldberg Variations* like the *Contrapuncti* of the *Art of Fugue* reflect, on listening, a total command of technique in music expressively and rhetorically accomplished, composed in the wake of a supreme musical tradition.

This appears also in the famous portrait by Elias Gottlob Haussmann, in which Bach presents a *Canon triplex* that is found also as number 13 of the 14 manuscript Canons that Bach himself added to his own copy of the *Goldberg Variations* and for which the bass is formed from the *Acht fundamental = Noten* of the opening Aria. Bach in the portrait is not presented as a supercilious man of learning but shows smiling the highly refined Canon with a blearily satisfied air (seine Augenkrankheit!), very different from the figure of a dry studious Bach, determined by the knowledge that high science is a means, necessary for cosmic order but nevertheless always a means not an end to bring together the result of pure art, the union of intellect and feeling like the synthesis of Gothic cathedrals, in which wise and daring architecture is sustained by what is more irrationally rational, faith.

Numbers and symbolism are factors certainly to admire but are for Bach a framework, coinciding with structural and discursive harmony in which is set the musical masterpiece. The *sacerdotes* of the Bach cult doubt Bach's humour just like Jorge da Burgos, who in Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose* denies that of Christ, of which he declares there is no trace in the Gospels, where there is no laughter. Unlike the Pythagorean *laudatores*, in conclusion I can affirm that the compliment more to be preferred than "*But what a brain, Master Bach*" would rather be "*Most Illustrious Herr Königlich Pohlnischer u. Churfürstlich Sæchsischer Hoff-Compositeur, Capellmeister, u. Director Chori Musici in Leipzig your music is altogether so fine and poetic that it seems not just a Canon or a Double Counterpoint or above all a Doppeltverkehrter Contrapunkt!*"

Some Short Observations on the Interpretation

I have tried particularly to provide a reading that was not an example of sterile musicology but above all attentive to the musical content: an interpretation and not a mere performance. I have consequently used a historic instrument, the harpsichord, but without worrying about what instruments were supposed to have been used by Bach in the 1740s, a precaution absolutely useless in view of the breadth of views and influences to which musicians were subject in the baroque era, where we see instruments of very different types normally used.

For this reason I play a Taskin model that reflects a style, the French, to which Bach dedicated his splendid *Contrapunctus 6*, and this is why I also employ the *peau-de-buffle*, the use of which, although documented organologically from 1767, in any case reflects the many and varied interests, the curiosity, the aesthetic and the modernity of Bach, who invented and had constructed instruments such as the viola pomposa and above all the lute-harpsichord, this last named in his will and of which Agricola left the following description in a note to Adlung's *Musica mechanica organoedi* (1768):

The editor of these notes remembers having seen and heard a "Lautenclavicymbel" in Leipzig in about 1740, designed by Mr. Johann Sebastian Bach and made by Mr. Zacharias Hildebrand, which was smaller in size than a normal harpsichord but in all other respects similar. It had two choirs of gut strings, and a so-called little octave of brass strings.

As far as concerns the phrasing I have in the first place given a recognisable sign of the theme in giving clear identity to the first phrase through a single breath that develops up to the fifth note included: C sharp (B flat in the inversion of the theme),

⁴⁸ How here not to remember the youthful (1704) *Capriccio sopra la lontananza del suo fratello dilettissimo* BWV 992 with the *Aria di Postiglione* and the *Fuga all'imitazione della cornetta di postiglione*? In Bach's library there were further imitative passages by his son Friedemann, such as the *Bourleska (l'imitation de la Chasse)* and *La Reveille*: qv. K. BEISSWENGER, *Johann Sebastian Bachs Notenbibliothek*, cit., Zweiter Teil. Among the French Bach possessed music by D'Anglebert, F. Couperin, de Grigny, probably Boyvin, Raison, in addition to works by Kerll, among which almost certainly the *Capriccio on the Cuckoo*.

heralding diminished sevenths. Therefore in the diminished theme I have given particular prominence to the urgency of the crotchets or quavers up to the *climax* C sharp/B flat:

Always from the point of view of clear and directional phrasing I have paid attention to the breathing, articulations and tendencies of the periods, using for this purpose the technique of bringing out voices according to the stipulations of François Couperin, of which more above: aspiration and suspension.

Of fundamental importance for this purpose has been the reading in score for four voices, too often neglected by performers. To give one example, in Contrapunctus 4 I have given attention, through breathing, phrasing and Couperin technique, to the inverted theme combined with the song of the cuckoo but also taken account of the module of the three connecting quavers that appear at the end of the theme at the fourth bar but that already in the fifth and sixth exhibit an ostinato character thanks to the restriction of the extremes of the interval of a diminished third.

Collation with the Autograph has shown not only preceding versions but also revisions of the printed version itself which I have therefore adopted. In particular Contrapunctus 6 presents in the Autograph important elements of specific notation with respect to the printed version of which there appears an integration more than an anticipation and in that sense I have introduced them. From the point of view of fullest integration of performance indications, in Contrapunctus 8 I have also preferred to play all the trills indicated in the printed version also where they are difficult to play, without making my task easier with the specious observation that they are not present in the Autograph, considering also the very probable hypothesis of the loss of the score from which the printed version has presumably drawn.

I have adopted similar procedure with the ornamentation of Contrapunctus 9 carrying forward the trill indicated in bar 5 into all following entries. From bar 27 of Contrapunctus 11 I have given a lower mordent to the inversion of the initial subject of Contrapunctus 8 with the exception of the bars where this appears in recto (58, 69, 107) and where I have obviously played an upper trill.

Similarly I have included the trills in the two pairs of mirror versions without recourse to the hypothetical three hands and even to the nose in passages of demanding a more difficult stretch!

In the Contrapuncti I have wanted to differentiate the single episodes in the Ricercare style that marks The Art of Fugue. In this sense I have not played the complete Contrapuncti with the same registration but have underlined the various affects with occasional changes of keyboard and with modest use of the machine-stop with knee-lever to enhance the variety so greatly neglected by performers in the fashionable baroque mode who have imposed a uniformity of sound in reaction to the Landowska-type harpsichord and to excessively colouristic organ registrations, at first understandable now absolutely and stolidly formalised.

On the other hand without Bach's clear indications who would alternate in the form prescribed the colours of the Italian Concerto or of the Dorian Toccata BWV 538?

I experience always a certain discomfort in playing the Fugue with three subjects and in particular the BACH theme that with its obsessive rhythm gives a tragic element, augmented by the unexpected interruption. The secular "trinitarity" of the form confirmed ostensibly as the third statement (the place of the Holy Spirit!) by the name theme recalls the mythical struggles of the Titans against Jupiter or the proud building of the Tower of Babel (Genesis XI, 4) followed by its gigantic downfall.

Finally I record that the harpsichord tuning is, according to Marpurg's indications, absolutely equal, owing to modern Bachian harmonic notions of which I have given an account above.

I have also already noted how at present only pianists, if also from a point of view often distorted as mentioned, seek a Bachian interpretation. Leader among all, also in the attempt to use proper ornaments and diminutions, Andras Schiff (alias Andrea Barca!) has proposed a fascinating Bach.

I must finally declare that, in spite of my identification of Bach as a universal genius, he remains nevertheless an absolute genius, born from the bosom of German culture that has enriched humanity in the highest way in the intellectual field.

Sergio Vartolo

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The skill of Sound Engineer Michael Seberich brought out the sound of the instruments while the editing was meticulously carried out by his colleague Simon Lanz. Maestro Antonio Scavuzzo provided me with artistic assistance of the highest competence, guiding me with careful skill in the realisation of the Magnum Opus: to him my acknowledgement (and that of the Kantor).

Keith Anderson has patiently deciphered my thinking, translating the present script with admirable accuracy: to him my particular thanks.

Venue: Aula Magna della Scuola Diocesana di Musica Sacra "S. Cecilia" di Verona

Recorded between 24th-28th March 2008

Harpsichords: Taskin copy; copy of 18th century Italian harpsichord

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