JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH
The Complete Organ Works, Vol. 11
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BACH, BEAUTY AND BELIEF
THE ORGAN WORKS OF J.S. BACH

Introduction – Bach and the Organ

The organ loomed large from early on in Bach’s life. The foundations of his multifaceted career as a professional musician were clearly laid in the careful cultivation of Bach’s prodigious talent as an organist whilst he was still a child. Johann Sebastian Bach was born in Eisenach in 1685, and after the death of his father – the director of municipal music in the town – at the age of ten moved to Ohrdruf, where he was appointed as organist in August of that year, remaining for four years, his first major professional organist post (Wolff 2001 p. 526). Clearly showing remarkable talent as a player from an early age, Bach’s career remained founded upon the organ even as he moved around in a variety of posts after leaving Arnstadt in 1707: as the organist of the young Sebastian was a choral scholar and likely had his first experiences in organ building and maintenance. In 1700 he moved to Lüneburg, as a choral scholar at St Michael’s School; this move brought him into the orbit of many organists, including Georg Böhm and Adam Reinken in Hamburg. In 1703 found him examining a new organ at the New Church in Arnstadt, where he was appointed as organist in August of that year, remaining for four years, his first major professional organist post (Wolff 2001 p. 526). Clearly showing remarkable talent as a player from an early age, Bach’s career remained founded upon the organ even as he moved around in a variety of posts after leaving Arnstadt in 1707: as the organist of
The Complete Organ Works of Bach

Given that strong foundation, it is no surprise that organ music flowed from Bach’s pen throughout his life. Yet how do Bach’s organ works cohere? For the monolithic notion of ‘The Complete Organ Works of Bach’ is misleading. The picture is more fluid, even unclear, both as to the veracity of individual works and of their particular chronology. The impression is of a combination of works that have reached us in their present form through an often uncertain process of revision and collection (such as the Six Sonatas, BWV 525 – 530) and those with a more definite origin and/or date, such as Clavierübung III, which was published in 1739. Even a collection with a clear didactic purpose that is apparently easy to date like the Orgelbüchlein, BWV 599 – 644 (its title page is dated in 1739. Others are easier by virtue of their singularity either to ascribe authorship to, such as the Passacaglia, BWV 582, or to date, such as the Concerto Transcriptions, BWV 592 – 596, which are from Bach’s Weimar years (Williams 2003 p. 202). However, the fluidity of the corpus is not as interesting — or as significant — as the stylistic and generic variety it exhibits.

Genres, Styles and Influences

Bach’s organ works are characterised, typically for the composer, by a multiplicity of genres and stylistic influences. Broadly they can be categorised into five areas, though inevitably these overlap: chorale-based works (preludes, partitas, variations, trios); the Six Sonatas; preludes/toccatas/fantasias (including the Passacaglia) and fugues (paired together, and single); transcriptions of works by other composers (concertos, trios, etc.); miscellaneous works (Airabreve, Canzona, Pièce D’Orgue, etc.). Williams catalogues the multifarious stylistic influences on Bach’s organ works. Many of these are traceable to other contemporary German organ composers whose compositional style Bach would almost certainly have known. As Williams states, these would have included Pachelbel, Böhm, Buxtehude, Bruhns, Reinken, Kerl and Froberger. Bach’s organ works also frequently betray a French influence, both specifically, such as in the famous example of the Passacaglia, BWV 582, the first half of whose main theme originates in a piece by Raison, and more generically, such as in the C minor Fantasia, BWV 562 with its stylistic debt to French composers such as de Grigny. In addition, an Italian influence is often felt in the manual writing across-the-board from the quasi-string writing in the Six Sonatas to the tripartite Toccata in C, BWV 564 via the Frescobaldian Canzona, BWV 588 and Corellian Alabreve, BWV 589.

Purposes

As the above discussion suggests, it is not surprising that many of the exact original purposes for the organ works remain unknown, though in general terms the following categories of use can be discerned: liturgical (many, if not most, of the chorales and chorale preludes; some of the prelude/toccata and fugue pairs); didactic (the Six Sonatas; the Orgelbüchlein); stylistic assimilation (the concerto transcriptions; some toccatas and fantasias; Legrenzi and Corelli Fugues). In addition, collections such as Clavierübung III and perhaps the Schübler Chorales had a purpose that transcended their immediate utility: the desire to offer a musical-theological compendium (Clavierübung III), or leave a musical legacy (Schübler Chorales).

A Note on Current Bach Scholarship

Such is the scope of Bach’s organ works. But how have they been covered in the literature? There is a fascinating dialectic evident in current Bach studies more broadly between a hermeneutic taken up with purely musical concerns for Bach’s works, and a broader analytical approach to his music that seeks to contextualize Bach’s contrapuntal, figurative and harmonic peculiarities and complexities within a much broader framework.  

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6 The work of Peter Williams is helpful in this regard. See Peter Williams, The Organ Music of J.S. Bach: A Life in Music (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Peter Williams, J.S. Bach: A Life in Music (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).
involving contemporary theology, aesthetics, philosophy, and science. Assessing these different approaches to Bach’s music is difficult, as the results are inevitably mixed. On the one hand, there is a need to maintain a degree of musical integrity by allowing the musical features of Bach’s compositions to come first in any attempt to understand them. Thus, some of the least convincing musical-analytical work done from the contextual side arises from an approach to Bach’s music that is too superficial. On the other hand, there is a sense in some of the ‘music-only’ approaches that any recourse to relevant external and contextual questions ought to be dismissed out of hand when clearly such factors occasionally—perhaps often—played a legitimate role in the music itself whilst allowing for wider contextual questions to shape one’s thinking as appropriate, perhaps on a piece-by-piece basis. With that in mind, there seem to be two broad extra-musical contexts of particular relevance to the organ music of Bach in which purely musical observations can be worked out. These are theology, and aesthetics.

Theological Aesthetics

Peter Williams highlights a conundrum that needs tackling if one is to think theologically about Bach’s organ music, namely the tension that exists between Bach’s stated theological intention in composition (most famously revealed in the composer’s signature ‘S.D.G.’ – ‘Soli Deo Gloria’ (To God Alone Be Glory) – that has been found on some of Bach’s manuscripts, penned after the final bars) and the apparent self-interestedness of much of Bach’s music.11 The key that unlocks this dilemma is the observation made by John Butt,12 that for Bach, as for other Lutherans, the key to unlocking this dilemma is the observation made by John Butt,12 that for Bach, as for other Lutherans, music was intrinsically of eternal value. We can be more specific and outline two ways in which the inherent theological nature of music, as it was understood, appears to have influenced the music Bach actually wrote.

i) Music as Theological Metaphor

A theological idea that was found in the Leipzig circles in which Bach moved in the 1740s was that God’s beauty can be conceived conceptually as a type of harmonia:

God is a harmonious being. All harmony originates from his wise order and organization... Where there is no conformity, there is also no order, no beauty, and no perfection. For beauty and perfection consists in the conformity of diversity.13

This fundamental idea of God’s beauty as expressed in His unity-in-diversity immediately invites the metaphorical projection of this concept onto His creation: His beauty is expressed though His creation via the inherent theological nature of music, as it was understood, appears to have influenced the music Bach actually wrote.

ii) Music designed to move the Affections towards God

Ever since the discovery of Bach’s personal Lutheran Bible commentary, the so-called ‘Calov Bible’, it has often been noted that Bach’s music appears to have been intended as an expression of a specifically, and personally-held, Lutheran faith.14 The implications of this in seeking an informed speculation of Bach’s theological views of music are significant, for the indications...
in Luther’s writings are not only that he saw music as inherently theological on a number of different levels,16 but specifically that he saw music as having a role in moving the believer’s affections towards God, and thus an ability to strengthen the believer’s faith in Christ.17 Combining this insight with the commonly-observed (though not unchallenged) evidence of the Baroque Affektenelehre (or ‘Doctrine of the Affections’) in Bach’s music, it can be seen how often Bach’s sacred music (chorale-based or liturgically-intended, often both) makes its spiritual utility felt through its projection of a relevant (and sometimes) dominant affekt. This primary affekt is then projected through the musical material, itself often consisting of harmonic and motivic workings-out of a single inventio, or dominant musical figure.18 In the organ music, this notion is perhaps most useful in approaching the chorale preludes — a genre that covers many of the organ works — where in many cases the background text, where clear, often illuminates both the general affekt of a given prelude, and the specificity of particular harmonies and figurations that have been chosen to illustrate it.

**Conclusion — Bach, Beauty and Belief**

Although the label of ‘The Complete Organ Works of Bach’ for the corpus is a misnomer, there are still many varied ways in which to view it coherently; theological aesthetics is just one example. Theology and aesthetics combine throughout Bach’s organ music, uniting them as works that project a Christian Lutheran worldview through their specifically musical beauty. In this they serve as exemplars of the theology of another towering eighteenth-century Christian intellect, whose published thought also combined beauty and belief with an emphasis on the affections of the believer: the American pastor Jonathan Edwards, with whom Bach has once been compared.19 Edwards placed the affections-of-the-heart at the centre of his definition of genuine Christian experience, and thus taught that moving them God-ward was the primary aim of any means of grace in the church, whether preaching or music. As examples of Edward’s affection-driven theology in practice, the organ works of Bach clearly cohere in their common ability to promote both belief and beauty, or perhaps more accurately, belief through beauty.

**BWV 549 Prelude and Fugue in C minor**

BWV 549 has a fascinating provenance; Scholars note that the C minor work is a actually transposition of the Prelude and Fugue in D minor (BWV 549a) – an identical work transposed up possibly to avoid a high ‘d’ in the opening pedal solo (see Williams 2003 p. 125). The C minor version (BWV 549) played here also bears striking resemblances to the C major Prelude BWV 531. The Prelude of BWV 549 opens with an arresting pedal solo, based on a rising sequence of suspirans figures, highlighted by the characteristic ‘intake of breath’. The main material of the Prelude builds on the pedal’s figures, with an almost melancholy gravitas – evident in this recording. Of particular interest are the block chords heard around the half-way mark that contrast with the spun counterpoint, as well as a certain simplicity to the harmony. The simplicity carries over to the Fugue, with its long melodic subject, written as though with a silent text. Texturally, there is an audible similarity with Prelude — compare the manual’s block chords when the pedal finally enters (after a lengthy manualiter exposition). Eventually, semiquaver-driven writing breaks free into free demisemiquavers for the final section.

**BWV 718 Christ lag in Todesbanden**

‘Christ lag in Todesbanden’ is one of Luther’s Easter texts and set to a chorale that was used a number of times by Bach. BWV 718 is a chorale fantasia: relatively small-scale in length, but ambitious and far-ranging in scope and style. The melody throughout is stylised with ornaments and the accompaniment based on a repeated rhythmic figure. The setting moves from a two-part texture at the start to three- and even four-part textures later, with the pedal enters for a reiteration of the final ‘Hallelujah’.

**BWV 563 Fantasia and Imitatio in B minor**

The Fantasia is written for manuals only, building a 24-bar piece out of light, airy dactyl (long-long-short) figures, in four-parts. Though the musical figures are standard, common for the time, the work reflects careful craftsmanship. Listen for the pedal coming in near the end, on a low E, as the material becomes freer in the final section, with the harmony expertly handled. In this recording, the Fantasia is given

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16 Robin A. Laney, Luther’s Liturgical Music: Principles and Implications (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007).
17 See Luther’s directions to believers suffering depression: ‘When you are sad, therefore, and when melancholy threatens to get the upper hand, say: “Aris! I must play a song unto the Lord on my lute […]” Then begin striking the keys and singing in accompaniment, as David and Elisha did, until your sad thoughts vanish.’ Martin Luther, Theodore G. Tappert (ed.), Martin Luther’s Liturgical Music: Principles and Implications (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007).
a reduced registration, up to 2’. The Imitatio connects to the Fantasia, reflected on this disc in the common registration. The connection is also seen in the shared manualiter texture, and a certain symmetry in the shape of the opening motifs. The chief difference lies in the metre of the Imitatio – quadruple (4/4) becomes and dancing triple (3/4). On this recording the speed is carefully related to tie the two parts together: the crotchet speed of the Fantasia becomes the dotted minim speed of the Imitatio.

BWV 530 Trio sonata No. 6
The Vivace of the sixth Trio is an Italianate ritornello, typical of Bach’s other organ trios – and perhaps the most violinistic of the six. The chief motif is a spritely descending figure that develops into a sequence again typical of the genre, punctuated with single pedal notes; like others in the Trios it stands out for beauty of melody and harmony. This movement is notable for a lively pedal part that plays a full role in the counterpoint. It is given a clean registration here – two 8’ Principals with a 16’ and 8’ bass.

BWV 570 Fantasia
The early Fantasia BWV 570 is free-standing, not related to a fugue as such. It is also, like BWV 563 on this disc, written for manuals only. There are other similarities with BWV 563 which make sense of their being paired here: listen for example to the pedal points, long held notes in the bass (though not necessarily played on the pedals) which underpin the harmony at various moments. In this performance, the thoughtful affect of the work stands out, highlighted by a subdued registration with tremulant.

Partita I, is the chorale set in rich harmony and dense texture, played on a full pleno registration, with occasional ornaments bringing our colour.

Partita II is a bicinium – a two part texture, with the chorale melody decorated in the right hand, the left hand accompanying with running semiquavers. The piquancy of the harmony is striking, brought out with subtle chromatic shifts. Note the echo effects, brought out on this recording.

Partita III, as is typical for Bach’s chorale partitas, each individual ‘partita’ tends to explore a single musical figure. This is evident in Partita III, the rhythm of the left hand’s initial five notes running through the whole.

Partita IV is here given a performance that brings out the whirlwind-like quality of the running semiquavers heard throughout, mostly in the right hand but occasionally spilling over into the left hand in breathless imitation.

Partita V, though keeping the running semiquavers, is here given a contrasting treatment, with softer registration and tremulant. Bach turns the chorale’s phrases into elegantly structured sequences.

Partita VI is in a different mould, with the metre turning to a compound 12/8 and the imitation between the hands producing large leaps.

Partita VII, the final Partita, closes the circle of the structure as the pedals enter again for the first time since Partita I. They play the chorale melody in long notes under the manuals, which play in the manner of stile brisé, the broken chord texture common in harpsichord music. This propels the music forward to its climax in the final bars.

BWV 583 Trio in D minor
BWV 583 is an elegant one-movement trio; in this recording the two manuals given a similar registration, with gentle mutations adding colour to the quiet reeds. The ‘Adagio’ marking highlights the thoughtful elegance of the writing, the affect similar to the first movement of the D minor Trio Sonata (BWV 527). The spun-out main motif is developed into some beautiful sequences (here given greater expression through ornaments).
Williams points out that certain qualities of the work suggest that it is not by Bach – for example, some near parallel fifths in the harmony; an opening pedal line that is not related to the main thematic material; and primary musical material that in other Bachian contexts would assume only secondary importance. Nevertheless, it is an attractive work.

**BWV 569 Prelude in A minor**

Like BWV 570 heard above, the A minor Prelude BWV 569 stands alone, and accepted as an authentic early work of Bach. The opening bears interesting comparison with the more famous A minor organ Prelude (BWV 543), for it shares with this work a chromatic intensity. After this opening, BWV 569 develops its *suspirans* figures with a certain predictability, a fact that also connects it to the first work on this disc, BWV 549. However, unlike that C minor work, as BWV 569 progresses the chromaticism of the opening gradually infuses the harmony, Bach relentlessly pursuing the musical possibilities of the single figure. Listen for the occasional false relation, particularly heard as resulting from the pedal’s wide leaps. This pedal line is given fine profile in this recording by 16’ reed of the Trinity College instrument.

**BWV 732 Lobt Gott, ihr Christen, allzugleich**

The chorale of BWV 732 is a Christmas text, published in 1560 by N. Herman. In this setting, perhaps intended to accompany a congregation, the chorale is given rich instrumental treatment with improvisatory runs in between phrases. Some have read musical symbolism into these runs, for example a rapid descending scale figure (heard in the middle of the setting in bar 8) perhaps alludes to the reference to Christ’s incarnation in the text (‘und schenkt uns einen Sohn’).

**BWV 706/1 Liebster Jesu, wir sind hier**

Musically, BWV 706 follows beautifully from the previous track, with the final chord of the previous chorale setting leading in to the first chord of the present setting. This is a prelude on ‘Liebster Jesu’, one of many by Bach. This is given a contrasting treatment from the chorale which precedes it, with a softer registration bringing out the gentleness inherent in one of the texts associated with the chorale: ‘Dearest Jesu, we are here/to listen to you and your word; direct our minds and desires to the sweet teachings of heaven,/that our hearts be drawn from earth/wholly towards you’ (translation Williams 2003 p. 298).

**BWV 564 Toccata, Adagio and Fugue**

This work is unique: a three-movement form that has been likened to an Italian concerto, with a fast-slow-fast structure. As such, it represents a typically extensive Bachian revision of the North German *preludium* genre. The Toccata begins with an extended opening showcasing both manual and pedal passage work of the highest degree of virtuosity. On this recording, note the echo effects in the in both the manual and pedal registrations that highlight the rhetorical nature of the writing. The extended opening leads to the main body of the Toccata, which is based on a rising figure with each phrase moving swiftly to its close. The second movement, a slow *Adagio* is Italianate, like a string concerto slow movement with pizzicato *basso continuo*. The melancholy melody soars out, in this recording the faster tempo bringing out the inherent spirit of dance that underlies the metre. After the melody seems almost to die out, the final bars are notable for rich and chromatic harmony, standing apart from the rest of the work: in this recording given a strong, passionate affect through a full *pleno* registration. For the third movement, the clouds clear for a lively gigue-like *Fugue*. The episodic nature of the Toccata is evident in the playful silences that break up the Fugue’s subject, whose countersubject feature running semiquavers, bell-like and resplendent, all the elements combine together to give a joyful affect. The ending is striking for its quirky final chord, extended here in ornamentation.

George Parsons, 2019
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The organ of Trinity College Chapel was built by the Swiss firm Metzler Söhne in 1976. The design, by Bernhardt Edskes, incorporated the surviving pipework of the two organs built for Trinity by “Father” Bernard Smith in 1694 and 1708. The organ has three manuals and forty-two ranks, of which seven are original. The 8' Principal on the Rückpositiv is from Smith’s 1694 organ, while the 16' Principal on the Pedal and the 16' Principal, 8' and 4' Octave, 2' Quinte, and 2' Superoctave on the Great are from 1708. The Victorian enlargements to both the instrument and its cases have been removed, and all the pipework is contained within the restored Smith cases, whose carving recalls the school of Grinling Gibbons. The cases are likely to have been designed by Smith and executed by him or one of his team. The salient characteristics of this mechanical-action organ are the meticulous craftsmanship and artistic integrity employed by Metzlers, the durability of the instrument, together with its rich but gentle resonance, its aptness for the acoustics of the Chapel, and its exquisite balance. It is understandably regarded as one of the finest instruments in the United Kingdom.

THE ORGAN OF TRINITY COLLEGE CHAPEL.

### Hauptwerk, C†

1. Principal 16
2. Octave 8
3. Hohlflöte 8
4. Octave 4
5. Spitzflöte 4
6. Quinte 2 5/8
7. Superoctave 2
8. Sesquialter III
9. Cornett IV
10. Mixtur IV-V
11. Trompete 8
12. Vox Humana 8

### Rückpositiv

13. Principal 8
14. Gedackt 8
15. Octave 4
16. Rohrflöte 4
17. Octave 2
18. Gemshorn 2
19. Larigot 1 1/8
20. Sesquialter II
21. Scharf III
22. Dulcian 8
23. Trompete 8
24. Treble 8

### Schwellwerk

25. Viola 8
26. Rohrflöte 8
27. Gedacktflöte 4
28. Nasmund 2 5/8
29. Doublette 2
30. Terz 1 1/8
31. Mixtur IV
32. Fagott 8
33. Trompete 8
34. Subbass 16
35. Octavbass 8
36. Octavbass 8
37. Bourdon 8
38. Octave 4
39. Mixtur IV
40. Posaune 16
41. Trompete 8
42. Trompete 4

### Pedal

43. Principal 16
44. Subbass 16
45. Octavbass 8
46. Bourdon 8
47. Octave 4
48. Mixtur V
49. Posaune 16

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Yearsley, David, Bach and the Meanings of Count
DAVID GOODE

David Goode is Organist at Eton College, combining this post with a flourishing performing career.

A music scholar at Eton, and then organ scholar at King’s College, Cambridge, he studied organ with David Sanger and in Amsterdam with Jacques van Oortmerssen. From 1996-2001 he was Sub-Organist at Christ Church, Oxford; following prizes at the 1997 St. Alban’s Competition, and the 1998 Calgary Competition, he concentrated on a freelance career between 2001 and 2003. In 2003 he moved for 2 years to Los Angeles as Organist-in-Residence at First Congregational Church, home to the world’s largest church organ.

In 1999 he made the first of numerous appearances at the Proms, and in 2002 he made his recital debuts at the RFH and at Symphony Hall, Birmingham, subsequently playing all over Europe, the US, Australia and the Far East. He plays at the AGO National Convention in June 2016. He also has an established partnership with the trumpeter Alison Balsom: in March 2014 they played for the reopening concert of the RFH organ.

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Of his Bach CD for Signum in 2013 The Times said: ‘One of Britain’s finest organists puts the 1714 organ in Freiberg Cathedral through its paces ... An exemplary introduction’. 7 CDs of a complete survey of Reger’s organ music have now also appeared, to warm reviews. He has forged a strong relationship over the years on Radio 3 with the BBC National Orchestra of Wales and the BBC Singers, and has played numerous contemporary works, including Francis Pott’s Christus (‘a stupendous achievement’ The Times), and Peter Maxwell Davies’ Solstice of Light.

He has also developed a profile as a composer: a set of anthems has been published, together with recordings by the choir of King’s College, Cambridge; and his Blitz Requiem was performed in September 2013 by the Bach Choir at St Paul’s Cathedral, and broadcast on Classic FM. He played at the AGO Convention in June 2016, and was a juror at the 2017 St. Alban’s International Competition.

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Johann Sebastian Bach: The Complete Organ Works Vols. 1-10
David Goode organ

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