BWV 1128: A recently discovered Bach organ work

Joel H. Kuznik

Latest Bach manuscript discovery: “Wo Gott der Herr nicht bei uns hält,” BWV 1128

The discovery of a Bach manuscript always raises curiosity and excites expectant interest. This latest work, an organ chorale fantasia just discovered in March, is a reminder that new revelations can come at any time from any source.

A copy of the Cäcilius Bible was found in a attic in Frankenmuth, Michigan in 1804, but forgotten until after World War II, in 1962. More recently in 1999, after a 20-year detective hunt worthy of a spy mystery and with a tip from an East German librarian, Christian Wolff tracked down C.P.E. Bach’s estate, with 5,100 musical manuscripts, to Kiev. Originally in the Berlin State Library, the Russian army absconded with this treasure trove of manuscripts after the war. Included were works by Johann Sebastian, among which was his last work, a motet he apparently prepared for his own funeral.

In 2004 an aria by Bach was found in Weimar in a box of birthday cards guards of the Anna Amalia Library, put months before it was destroyed by fire. Two years later in 2006 from the same Weimar library, researchers also found Bach’s oldest manuscripts in his own hand: organ works by Buxtehude and Reinken he copied at the age of fifteen. Most recently in March of 2008, a newly discovered organ work was found in an estate sale in Leipzig, in a sense, under the noses of the musicans at St. Thomass...

This is a double review. The first discusses the organ score and reveals a fascinating history of teacher-student transmission, estate sales, alert and not-so-alert librarians, savvy editors, guesswork and unanswerable questions. Much like studies in genealogy, one can trace documented history back only so far, and, in this case, only to the mid-nineteenth century, 100 years after Bach’s death. The second review of the CD, featuring both the organ fantasia and the cantata based on the same chorale, was released on June 13, 2008 at the opening concert of the Leipzig Bachfest and shares Ulrich Böhm’s experience of studying and preparing a first performance of a Bach work. How many have had that opportunity?

Obviously this is not the end of the story. No doubt surprises and discoveries will still await detection by sharp-eyed scholars and through pure serendipity.


Contents

Prologue by Schulze, musicologist and former director of the Bach-Archiv Leipzig. Critical report on Source A (Halle, Martin Luther University, University-State Library of Sachsen-Anhalt, with signature) and Source B (Leipzig, Bach-Archiv, no signature) with score variants noted. Chorale melody from “J. S. Bach” (Dresden 1880 / Berlin 1881) on p. 93 lists “24 books of organ compositions by Bach . . .,” no one could have anticipated that this included parts of Prieger’s collection and the chorale fantasia BWV 1128. The Rust’s collection of manuscripts was published by the University-State Museum of Halleschalle, and finally due to the fastidious work of two editors, Stephan Blaut and Michael Pacholke of Halle University, the chorale was once again discovered and has become BWV 1128!


History

It is not that an organ work by Bach was just discovered and authenticated March 15, 2008 after it had passed through so many hands, including collectors, musicologists, editors and auction houses.

According to Schulze’s foreword, this is what is known to date. The first public recording of this chorale fantasia is 1845, almost 100 years after Bach’s death, listed among organ pieces by “Sebastian Bach” in the estate auction for Johann Nicolaus Julius Kötschau (1785–1845), once organist at St. Mary’s in Halle/Saale. According to public record, he acquired this piece in 1845 along with the collection of the Leipzigischen Musikgesellschaft (1720), Bach’s son and once an organist in Halle, who had passed the score on to his distant relative and student Johann Christian to Kötschau, and then from Kötschau to the Königsberg Library in East Prussia. In 1852, in a letter to Christian, the music was once again listed as “Source A” by Rust and his Bach edition. It was among organ pieces by “Sebastian Bach” among the Krieghoff Collection at Königsberg, East Prussia. In 1852, in order to preserve his collection, he donated it to the Königsberg Library, but it only drew attention 25 years later when Joachim August Goltz (1800–1883), a former director of the Collegium in Königsberg, East Prussia. In 1852, in order to preserve his collection, he donated it to the Königsberg Library, but it only drew attention 25 years later when Joseph August Goltz (1800–1883), a former member of the Sing-Akademie Berlin and then director of the Collegium in Königsberg, East Prussia. In 1852, in order to preserve his collection, he donated it to the Königsberg Library, but it only drew attention 25 years later when Joseph August Goltz (1800–1883), a former member of the Sing-Akademie Berlin and then director of the Collegium in Königsberg, East Prussia. In 1852, in order to preserve his collection, he donated it to the Königsberg Library, but it only drew attention 25 years later when Joseph August Goltz (1800–1883), a former member of the Sing-Akademie Berlin and then director of the Collegium in Königsberg, East Prussia. In 1852, in order to preserve his collection, he donated it to the Königsberg Library, but it only drew attention 25 years later when Joseph August Goltz (1800–1883), a former member of the Sing-Akademie Berlin and then director of the Collegium in Königsberg, East Prussia. In 1852, in order to preserve his collection, he donated it to the Königsberg Library, but it only drew attention 25 years later when Joseph August Goltz (1800–1883), a former member of the Sing-Akademie Berlin and then director of the Collegium in Königsberg, East Prussia. In 1852, in order to preserve his collection, he donated it to the Königsberg Library, but it only drew attention 25 years later when Joseph August Goltz (1800–1883), a former member of the Sing-Akademie Berlin and then director of the Collegium in Königsberg, East Prussia...
The influence of the North German composers is higher in "Chorton," so the pitches g' and a' lie in the lower "Kammerton," whereas the pitches f' and b' lie in the upper "Mixtur." It is probable that Bach played this piece on the Bach Organ at St. Thomas, experimenting and practicing, and then on the evening of April 30 he played the work to one of his sons or students to play on the Organ of St. Thomas Church in Leipzig, picking up a score from the publisher, and purchasing for 2,500 euros by two scholars from the University of Halle. The melody of the chorale had been written by Justus Jonas, a friend of Bach, and purchased for 2,500 euros by two scholars from the University of Halle. The newspaper on March 16, 2008 and the website reported that it was "snatched away from the scholars from the University of Halle." So Ullrich Böhme, his personal account: Fascinating, eloquent, ever delightful, always sensitive to the chorale text, realizing the Lutheran approach, which is never performance for its own sake, but music as a servant of theology and worship. While this CD largely features organ music and Böhme's extraordinary playing in the other performances—St. Thomas Choir and Gewandhaus Orchestra under Cantor Georg Christoph Biller—are, as expected, exceptional. The performers are all steeped in the veneration of the text and the devotional consciousness of the text and the earnest intent to reflect its meaning. The performers are all steeped in the Bach milieu and tradition, performing Bach week after week, year after year in worship and concert. Böhme's playing is equally elegant and eloquent, ever consistent, yet always sensitive to the chorale text, realizing the Lutheran approach, which is never performance for its own sake, but music as a servant of theology and worship. While this CD largely features organ music and Böhme's extraordinary playing, the other performers—St. Thomas Choir and Gewandhaus Orchestra—under Cantor Georg Christoph Biller—are, as expected, exceptional. This CD and its brochure should certainly pique the interest, as Bach would say, of both "Kenner und Liebhaber" (professionals and music lovers).

During his career Joe Kozak has served as a college organist and professor, a church musician, a pastor, and as a business executive on Fifth Avenue, Wall Street, and at MetaLife. After several years of retirement from business, he resumed teaching for professional organists, something he had done since his college days. After attending the Bachfest 2003 in Leipzig, he again began writing articles and reviews. With over 60 pieces to print ranging from reviews of concerts and festivals, encyclopedias, books on church music, concert halls, organs, CDs, and DVDs, he was recognized and named to the Music Critics Association of North America (MCANA) in May 2005. He is also a member of the American Bach Society and serves on the board of the Bach Verein at Holy Trinity in New York City, where he has lived for 32 years.

His organ teachers were Austin C. Lovelace, Frederick Swann, Ronald Arraud, and Czeszjarg. From Langscheidt, Marie-Madeleine Dupuis-Chedeville, and Anton Weiller. As a member of the AGO, he has served as chairman of the B. Wagner chapter, on the executive board of the New York City chapter, and on the national financial board. He holds a BA and a master's degree in organ performance from Boston University School of Music. Thanks to Ullrich Böhme, Organist, St. Thomas Church, Leipzig, who provided invaluable information, including contacts for getting the score and the CD within ten days of its first performance in Leipzig on June 13 and providing the specification of the Wender organ in Halle.

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