

BACH NOTES

NEWSLETTER OF THE AMERICAN BACH SOCIETY

GLOBAL BACH

Report on the 2024 ABS Meeting at Emory University

Annika Fabbi (University of Ottawa)

The 23rd biennial meeting of the American Bach Society was held at Emory University from September 26-29, 2024. This year’s theme of “Global Bach” allowed participants to draw connections between Bach and his music, and a global context—whether historical or modern. Located in Atlanta, Georgia, the conference was impacted by Hurricane Helene, preventing two presenters (Mary Greer and Andrew Talle) and numerous members from attending. Nonetheless, the conference was able to proceed largely uninterrupted by the hurricane.

The conference began Thursday evening with a reception and a concert by The Sebastians. Made up of Daniel Lee and Nicholas DiEugenio on violin, Ezra Seltzer on cello, and Jeffrey Grossman on harpsichord, The Sebastians are a New York-based early music ensemble. Their program paired music by Johann Sebastian Bach, Georg Philipp Telemann, Carl Philipp Emmanuel Bach, Johann Gottlieb Goldberg, and Antonio Vivaldi with a new piece by Patricia van Ness. Commissioned by The Sebastians, “On Joy” is in six movements, drawing on a variety of Baroque forms.

Friday, the first full day of the conference, started with a welcome address given by Daniel Melamed and Stephen Crist. The first paper session, entitled “Interpreting Bach,” began with William Fischer’s paper. Using a variety of scholarly and popular sources, he examined the history of the Bärenreiter Verlag company and raised questions concerning how to contend



with the actions of the company during the Third Reich. Next to present was Melamed. His paper called for a move away from the pictorial method of analyzing cantatas, as inherited from Schweitzer, and stressed the importance of examining cantatas in the contexts of 18th-century musical conventions and Lutheranism.

The Sebastians very kindly performed a second, bonus concert for us during the lunch break on Friday. Their “Eine Kleine Mittagessenmusik” program contained music by George Frideric Handel, Arcangelo Corelli, and J. S. Bach.

The Friday afternoon session opened with Stephen Crist’s paper. Establishing a link between Bach’s early chorale cantatas

In This Issue:

Global Bach	1
Review: Bach’s St. John Passion for the Twenty-First Century.	3
Stauffer and Butler Honored	8
Teri Noel Towe (1948–2025)	10
ABS Grant Winners.	11
Announcements.	11
Member News.	12

and 16th-century Lutheran hymns, this presentation explored the holdings of Emory University's Pitt Theology Library. Next up was Sashi Ayyangar's paper demonstrating Nicholas Bruhns's impact on Bach's early fugue style. Focused especially on permutation fugues, this paper showed Bruhns as a stylistic bridge between Bach and the earlier generations. The session concluded with my own paper, seeking to establish a link between an editor's musical identity and patterns of editorial decision making. By comparing editions of Bach's Capriccio, BWV 992, I demonstrated how editions represent where and when they were created.

On Friday evening we were supposed to be treated to an organ recital by Jack Mitchener, which was unfortunately cancelled due to Hurricane Helene. A [video](#) of the rescheduled recital has since been distributed to ABS members. Later that evening, the honorary lifetime membership awards were presented to George Stauffer and Gregory Butler, who gave the celebratory speeches for one another.

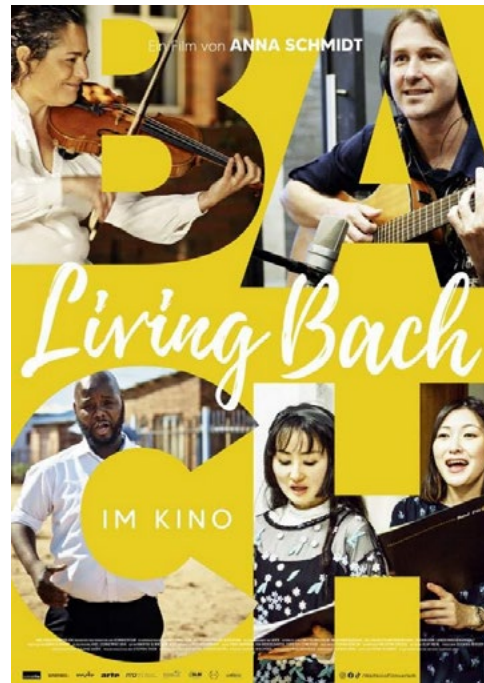
Saturday morning's session was themed around Bach and poli-



tics. Kailan Rubinoff gave the first paper presenting the *Utrechter Passion*, a contrafactum of the *St. John Passion* with a new libretto by Thomas Höft describing historic and modern instances of homophobic violence. Her analysis of the piece raised questions of Bach reception in the Netherlands. The next paper was delivered by George Stauffer. He examined the elements of our modern conception of democracy observable in Bach's music, despite the undemocratic society in which it was composed. The morning ended with Derek Stauff's paper on references to early music in Hermann Hesse's *The Glass Bead Game*. In addition to analyzing the role these references play in the novel, the presentation

inquired into Hesse's relationship with early music and the field of musicology.

Saturday afternoon was devoted to a documentary screening and the keynote address. *Living Bach*, directed by Anna Schmidt, is a documentary following several amateur musicians worldwide as they prepared to travel with their choirs to perform at Leipzig's Bachfest 2022. This project, entitled "Bach: We Are Family," was also the theme of the keynote address delivered by Michael Maul. The talk described the process of developing and organizing the project as a symbolic continuation of the annual Bach family reunions. Saturday concluded with a concert of three J. S. Bach cantatas performed by the Atlanta Baroque Orchestra.



Sunday, the final day of the conference, began with the annual business meeting. Steven Zohn's paper kicked off the final session by demonstrating the use of Bach quotations in 19th-century autograph albums. These quotations show how musicians continued to interact and identify with Bach's music in private as well as public spheres. Nicholas Phan ended the session with an update on the Bach 52 project, which received the 2022 ABS diversity grant. Bach 52 pairs recordings of tenor arias from the church cantatas with interviews to explore the question "is Bach's music for everyone?" The series can be found at <https://nicholas-phan.com/bach52> or on the Bach 52 [YouTube channel](#).

Many thanks are owed to the conference organizers, program committee, and Emory University, without whom this conference would not have been possible. Special thanks are also owed to the staff of the Emory Conference Center, whose flexibility and hard work allowed us to have this successful conference even with the disruptions caused by Hurricane Helene. The next meeting of the ABS will take place October 1–4, 2026 at the Riemenschneider Bach Institute, Baldwin Wallace University, in Berea, Ohio.

Bach's *St. John Passion* for the Twenty-First Century

Reviewed by Daniel R. Melamed

Michael Fuchs and Bradley Jenson. *Bach's St. John Passion for the Twenty-First Century: Musical and Theological Perspectives*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2023.

Having just observed the 300th anniversary of the *St. John Passion's* first performance, we might want to take a collective look at the piece and its meanings. This recent book seeks to do that for a general readership, aiming for a study that is "academic" but also "fairly accessible" as it "summarize[s] and synthesize[s] much of the existing scholarship" and also considers the work's "continued importance and relevance in the twenty-first century" (xi). This is an admirable goal, but reaching it convincingly depends on a deep knowledge of the work and its context. The intent behind this new book is admirable, but the authors (Michael C. Fuchs, Director of Choral Activities at the University of Wisconsin-Superior, and Bradley C. Jenson, a Lutheran pastor and Certified Financial Planner) offer interpretations that often end up perpetuating approaches to the piece that are open to serious question.

To begin with, the authors show a willingness to credit Bach with both text and music of the *St. John Passion*, and with every decision about them. They acknowledge that the text might have been the work of a librettist, but also allow that he might have compiled it on his own. (54) There is no evidence, across all of his vocal works, to suggest Bach's authorship of any text he set to music. The authors assert that "Bach would have enjoyed considerable freedom to change the libretto or adapt it as he saw fit." (54) They have no evidence for this, nor did Alfred Dürr, whom they cite as the source of this statement.

The authors cite an impressive range of secondary sources, but there is little distinction made between those that are historical and those that are interpretive. Nor is it clear why they sometimes seem to rely equally on peer-reviewed original scholarship and on overviews offered in DMA theses. The authors sometimes also appear to be too invested in theories from the secondary literature even when their own view offers good alternatives. Most telling in this regard is their discussion of the changes Bach made for the 1725 second performance of the *St. John Passion*. They offer

BACH'S ST. JOHN PASSION for the TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Musical and Theological Perspectives



MICHAEL FUCHS AND BRADLEY JENSON

Foreword by Christoph Wolff

a list of possible reasons, mostly with reference to the authors who have suggested them: avoiding a repetition of the 1724 passion, a desire for a connection with the 1724–25 chorale cantata cycle, disrupted plans for presenting some other work, or theological controversy requiring revisions. (68) But they do not consider another factor they discuss clearly and insightfully: the change in theological perspective represented by the replacement of "Herr, unser Herrscher" (focused on glorification through abasement) with "O Mensch, bewein

dein Sünde gross” (which emphasizes human sinfulness and which is reinforced by the new concluding German “Agnus Dei”).

It is clear from his cantatas that Bach found it useful to have a repertory of musical works that took various theological approaches. This is particularly relevant because the scriptural reading for Good Friday, at whose vesper service the *St. John Passion* was performed, alternated annually between two passages. One was a verse from Psalm 22 that begins “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” words also spoken by Jesus from the cross (in Matthew and Mark’s gospels) that emphasize his suffering. The other was a verse from Isaiah 53 that begins “But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was bruised for our iniquities,” which points to human sinfulness. In fact these readings were used, in that order, in 1724 and 1725, corresponding to the two versions of the *St. John Passion*. Perhaps Bach made the changes in 1725 to offer a different theological perspective of the passion story. That would weaken the authors’ suggestion that “Bach’s return to the original 1724 version in subsequent years is a silent endorsement of his original music, structure, and theological perspective” (68); the post-1725 performances may simply have called for the first version’s theological orientation.

Central to a study like this is the problem of modern vs. historical perspectives of the work. This is particularly significant with respect to its theology. Although this book is at pains to take eighteenth-century views into account in many aspects of the work, the authors’ reading of the *St. John Passion* is very much of the twenty-first century despite the attention they give to the need to understand Bach’s own Lutheran theology. This is well illustrated in the chapter on the libretto, particularly its sections on “The Purpose of the Gospel of John as a Whole” and “Scholarly Reaffirmation of the Atoning Significance of Jesus’s Death.” Here the authors tend to flatten historical theology by citing mostly modern scholarship on what John’s gospel must mean. They write that “Although the modern Christian is likely not sharing the same specific theological beliefs that Bach or his congregation held, there is nevertheless a shared Christian perspective that can create a powerful sense of meaning and relevance.” (13)

I understand that emphasizing commonality between modern religious views and those of Bach’s time is an interpretive choice, and that it sets up the section called “An Interpretation of the Libretto for Our Time.” But the language of this discussion consistently asserts what the message of the passion narrative is, or what the significance of John’s gospel is, and what work the texts added to the libretto (poems and hymn stanzas) are doing, all in absolute terms in the present tense. Perhaps the tacit premise is that this is how the text works for readers today, but the historical record makes it clear that the theology of Bach’s time was radically different

from those of the present day, and we cannot ignore that in interpreting religious music of his era.

The authors also make assumptions about the nature of historical listening. They write, for example, that “The poetry sections [of the libretto] are mostly structured as prayerful ‘I-Thou’ (i.e., human being-to-Jesus Christ) discourse, between the listener, as represented by the singers of the poetry, and Jesus.” (24) It is certainly possible that this was how Bach’s congregation understood performances, with the singers representing them as listeners, but do we know this? Along similarly problematic lines, the authors assert that the chorale “Dein Will gescheh, Herr Gott” “has the congregation praying the third petition of the Lord’s Prayer: ‘Thy will be done.’” (25) Again, this might be true, but only if we are sure that the chorale was understood to represent the congregation. A couple of movements later “So, too, in movement 9, the congregation declares, ‘With joyful steps, too, I will follow you [a]nd do not leave your side, [my] light and my life.’” (25) Now the voice of the soprano concertist has become “the congregation”; once again, what evidence is there that this was the understanding in Bach’s time? It might have been, of course, but the historical record is largely silent on this point.

A similar assumption surfaces in the discussion of Bach’s assignment of various roles to particular singers. The authors write “Bach did assign separate singers to the words of Jesus, Pilate, and Peter, even though they all fell in the bass range and could have technically been sung by the bass concertist. So although the bass concertist filled many different roles in the Passion, having the same person sing the words of three different characters was a bridge too far.” (43) Maybe that was the case here. But in the 1736 *St. Matthew Passion*, the same soprano sang the first maid, the second maid, and Pilate’s wife; a bass sang a priest, Peter, Pilate, and Caiphas. And in Bach’s performance in the 1710s of a *St. Mark Passion* probably by Reinhard Keiser, the same singer delivered the words of the Evangelist, Peter, and Pilate. It seems risky to speculate about the meaning of Bach’s procedures without knowing the full scope of what he did.

The authors see the passion’s text and its theology as a way into Bach’s music, but this can lead to problems if the theological starting point is questionable. For example, their discussion of the opening text of Version I (1724), “Herr, unser Herrscher, / Dessen Ruhm in allen Landen herrlich ist” appropriately stresses its paradoxically joyful character and its relationship to the widely understood Johannine topic of Jesus’s glorification through abasement. But there is no mention of Luther’s own reading of Psalm 8, the model for the first two lines of poetry. Luther wrote that this psalm represents King David’s expression of wonder that God so elevated Jesus Christ. In Luther’s view, the Hebrew Testament psalmist is explicitly writing about Jesus. Any theologically

informed listener in Bach’s time would have known this, and surely it had a bearing both on Bach’s musical decisions and on the way congregants would have heard the opening of the *St. John Passion*. Neither here nor elsewhere in the book do specifically Lutheran readings from Bach’s own time play a sufficient role.

Greater contextual awareness might also have informed the book’s (presumably new) English translation in its largest section, a movement-by-movement description and discussion of the work. This translation repeats the problems of almost every such effort in being insufficiently grounded in historical German and in biblical language. The result is a translation that misses meanings as they would have been understood in Bach’s time.

A characteristic example: The 1724 aria “Ach, mein Sinn,” which follows the moment of Peter’s denial of Jesus, includes the lines “Bleib ich hier, / Oder wünsch ich mir / Berg und Hügel auf den Rücken?” The authors translate this as “Should I stay here, / or would I prefer / mountains and hills at my back?” Yet the phrase “Berg und Hügel auf den Rücken” refers to a passage in Luke’s Gospel in which Jesus says that a time will come when people will say to the mountains “Fall on us” and to the hills “Cover us.” (“Dann werden sie anfangen zu sagen zu den Bergen: Fallet über uns! und zu den Hügeln: Decket uns!”) The passage thus would have been understood to mean “Or do I prefer mountains and hills [to fall] upon my back?” The 1725 replacement aria for this spot, “Zerschmettert mich, ihr Felsen und ihr Hügel,” draws on this same image. The poetic voice in both arias—not-quite-Peter-himself—wishes for his own destruction along the lines prophesied by Jesus. Awareness of this essential scriptural reference would have avoided the mistaken translation of “auf den Rücken.”

A few of the book’s musical errors are terminological. The kind of violin bow made popular by François Tourte, for example, is referred to as a “torque bow.” Elsewhere the authors point to the continuo line in the bass aria with chorale “Mein teurer Heiland” and claim that “the stately and dancelike character ... conveys a joyous affect.” They claim that “to reinforce this character, the string instruments in the continuo are instructed to play in a manner where the bow bounces lightly on the string (spiccato), contributing to the dance-like and joyous feel of the music.” (38) But in the early eighteenth century, “spiccato” (which Bach indeed put in the continuo parts) was a synonym for “staccato”; there is no implication of joy in the bass line here, rendering the interpretation of this aria’s affect questionable.

There are also references to supposed common knowledge about eighteenth-century music that has long since been challenged as oversimplified or wrong: misconceptions about “baroque pitch” (mostly not a matter, as claimed, of

local variation), or characteristics of keys (here treated far too broadly). The authors are firm believers in the existence of a lost Weimar passion setting by Bach, and explain many features of the *St. John Passion* by reference to it. But this is far from universally accepted as good history despite the enthusiasm for this theory in some influential writings.

There are a number of points the authors misunderstand about the well-investigated history of the *St. John Passion*. Of the 1749 version, for example, they write that “the instrumentation of the continuo may also have been different, but the evidence for this is incomplete.” (69) There are many things we do not know, but it is clear from the surviving material that the basso continuo in that year used harpsichord (played from a newly made part) and “bassono grosso” (whatever instrument that term might refer to, played from a marked-up continuo part dating back to 1724) in addition to the two players who used two additional continuo parts (one new and one old, presumably for cello and violone).

In explaining Bach’s setting of the text in the aria “Von den Stricken meiner Sünden,” the authors offer a creative interpretation. They write that the concept of “binding” (Jesus bound, the believer unbound) is musically represented by the imitation in the ritornello: “The two oboes are thus bound to each other thematically, melodically, and through the use of shared pitches.” (95) But a knowledge of contemporary settings quickly brings one to a much more likely eighteenth-century interpretation: The concept of “binding” is represented here by syncopation and ties (“Bindungen”) across the beats and barlines. This can be heard in Georg Philipp Telemann’s setting of the equivalent text by Brockes at the start of his *Brockes Passion*, or (closer to home) in Picander and Bach’s *St. Matthew Passion*, where the duet aria “So ist mein Jesu nun gefangen / Lasst ihn, haltet, bindet nicht!” depends heavily on syncopation.

A similar case involves the aria “Es ist vollbracht.” The authors recognize that the fast middle section represents the *Christus victor* topic of Jesus as warrior against death. (136) But they entirely miss the musical significance here, expressing surprise that the same musical topic appears in the aria “Zerschmettert mich” from 1725, declaring it “interesting that such similarities exist between two movements meant to convey such different ideas and emotions.” (162n142) But these are not two different ideas. Both passages invoke Claudio Monteverdi’s *conciato genere*, invented (he wrote in the 1638 preface to his eighth book of madrigals) to depict ire, rage, and battle. Bach used it often, for example in the movement “Friede sei mit euch/Wohl uns! Jesus hilft uns kämpfen” BWV 67/6, or the aria “Alles, was von Gott geboren/Ist zum Siegen auserloren” BWV 80a/1, both with battle texts. In the alto aria from the *St. John Passion* this musical type fits the text “the hero from Judah triumphs

with might,” an explicit reference to war. In the tenor aria, it metaphorically associates rage with the falling rocks and mountains that the poetic voice wishes on himself. The connection between the two—and Bach’s parallel musical treatment—is essential to understanding these movements, and requires a fluency with eighteenth-century conventions that is missing here.

The authors are also quick to embrace ad hoc symbolism. In the aria “Ich folge dir gleichfalls,” the two flutes that play the obbligato in unison are said to represent the two disciples mentioned in the previous recitative who are following Jesus. (98) Does that mean we should look for similar meaning in BWV 11/8, 161/6, 191/2, 205/13, 214/8, and 215/7, the other Bach vocal-instrumental movements with a doubled traverso line? At the least this would need to be argued, not just asserted. In the setting of the Evangelist’s “und geisselte ihn,” the authors suggest that “The notes of the vocal line are organized into groups of three, beginning in a dactylic rhythm (long-short-short), perhaps to represent the convention in Jewish law that called for lashes to be administered in groups of three.” (116) The signification of Jesus’s scourging here almost certainly lies in the bass line, with its dotted rhythm. One needs only compare the accompaniment “Erbarm es, Gott” from Bach’s *St. Matthew Passion*, which refers the same image, or the B section (with the text “He gave his back to the smiters”) of the aria “He was despised” from Handel’s *Messiah*, or the following chorus, “Surely he hath borne our griefs,” or that composer’s setting of the arioso “Besinne dich, Pilatus/Dein Bärenherz ist Felsenhart” from his *Brockes Passion*. This, too, was an eighteenth-century convention not recognized here.

Overall the authors’ interpretive approach adopts the pictorial symbolism championed by Albert Schweitzer, with origins in the nineteenth-century debate over absolute vs. programmatic music. The section of the book that introduces their interpretive method, called “Musical rhetoric, symbolism, and representation” (77ff.) places far too much confidence in the applicability of “rhetoric” to this music, confuses rhetoric and musical figures, and depends heavily on simplistic ideas like “text painting” and figures like the “cross motive.” Their reading, for example, of the setting of Jesus’s words “Soll ich den Kelch nicht trinken, den mir mein Vater gegeben hat?” is that “Perhaps the basso continuo line represents God giving this cup to Christ. The basso continuo line also outlines the shape of a cup, perhaps a deliberate visual representation by Bach.” (93) Is there any evidence that Bach thought this way?

To their credit, the authors do note the danger of trying to determine “Bach’s intentions” or to establish the correctness of symbolic readings (for example, of the musical layers in “Herr, unser Herrscher”), and recognize that meaning lies

primarily with the listener. (83) This is their starting point, they write, for “an analysis that this author finds meaningful in the hopes that it will provide a greater understanding of the *St. John Passion*, ask interesting questions, and illustrate a process by which the reader can begin to derive their own perspective and meaning.”

But what sort of analysis is that? If one is free to interpret the *St. John Passion* in any way that is personally meaningful, of what use is an understanding of its historical background? And what are we to make of a reading the modern author finds “meaningful” when Bach is credited as the inventor of the things pointed out? (The very first sentence of the movement-by-movement analysis begins “Bach draws the listener into the St. John Passion with a monumental chorus”—this is clearly Bach’s doing, as is the choice of musical devices explored in detail throughout.) One can’t have it both ways—either these represent Bach’s purposes or they are modern interpretations. The implicit appeal to the composer’s authority does not make these readings more convincing or correct.

One of the admirable aspects of this book is that the authors confront issues of antisemitism head on, devoting an entire chapter to this complex problem in connection with the *St. John Passion*. I wish I could report that they succeed in this, but in multiple respects their approach falls short. The authors adopt a familiar strategy in downplaying anti-Jewish elements in the work by emphasizing the *St. John Passion*’s first-person assignment of responsibility for Jesus’s death; they go so far as to say that “The Jews are not blamed.” (27) Their approach allows them to say, in their concluding remarks, that “The *St. John Passion* can and should be performed in the twenty-first-century because it is great art composed by one of the greatest musicians of all time: Johann Sebastian Bach.” (182) I have never been sanguine about this approach; it is possible for the piece to be theologically focused on the believer’s responsibility for Jesus’s death even as it presents a disturbing picture of the story’s Jews as the agents of his crucifixion.

The sense that they are waving away a problem is reinforced by their stance on Luther and the relevance of his writings to the understanding of John’s gospel. They write that they address Luther at all only “because [Michael] Marissen did so . . . even though there is no discernible connection between either Luther’s early writings or later writings on the Jews and the *St. John Passion* per se.” (182) Do they mean that there is no essay by Luther addressing the topic of the responsibility of the Jews in John’s narrative? Perhaps so, but Luther’s assignment of that responsibility can be seen at every turn in his commentaries on scripture. To give just one example, here is his commentary on the verse “Da ihn die Hohen-Priester und die Diener sahen, schrieten sie und

sprachen: Kreuzige, kreuzige” quoted in the Calov commentary Bible, a work Bach owned and studied:

“It must have been because Christ was brought out in such a miserable state that the Jews were crying out: Stop, Pilate, let it be, he has been beaten enough. But they act as if he had never been whipped, crowned, or mocked, and they shout simply ‘crucify,’ as if they were saying: Pilate, you whipped him, but remember, kill him, and kill him so that he may die a shameful death on the cross. John and the other evangelist have shown this in order to demonstrate how hatred and envy are so great and poisonous compared to the truth, and how Christ is innocently accused and condemned to death. For the Jews not only falsely accuse Christ, but also place themselves in judgment and pass sentence. Who has commanded them to do this? According to Roman law, it is Pilate’s duty to deliver the verdict, but they, the Jews, are both prosecutor and judge.”¹

We can certainly debate whether Luther’s views are relevant to today’s understanding of the *St. John Passion*, but there is little question about what contemporary theology taught in Bach’s time. One cannot responsibly pretend that this stuff does not exist. This raises some big questions about the authors’ conclusion that “When interpreted properly for the twenty-first century, Bach’s *St. John Passion* can avoid both antisemitism and anti-Judaism.” (182) Perhaps it can, but not without the willful suppression of transparently clear historical writings. If one does not bring to bear a knowledge of early eighteenth-century theology, it is possible to come to overly optimistic conclusions.

The authors’ handling of this issue in their own writing is also problematic. They repeatedly refer to utterances of “the crowd,” as in their comment that “Next, the listener’s identification with Peter in his denial morphs into a new identification in the passion narrative with the crowd, which shouts, ‘Hail, dear King of the Jews!’” (26) Or “This incessant

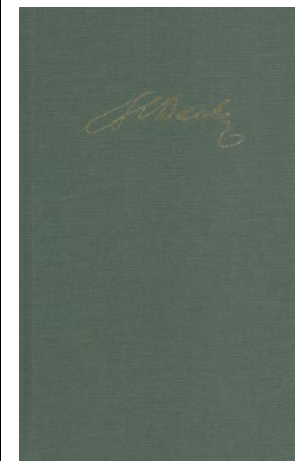
1 “Es solte wol darauff / daß Christus so jämmerlich herausführet wird / solche Stimme gefallen seyn bey den Jüden: Höre auf Pilate / laß gut seyn / er ist gnug geschlagen. Aber sie stellen sich / als wäre er nie gestäupet / nie gekrönet / noch gespottet / schreyen schlecht creutzige / als solten sie sagen: Pilate / du hast ihn gestäupet / aber gedenke / erwürge ihn / und erwürge ihn also / daß er sterbe des schmähhlichen Todes am Creutze. Solches hat Johannes mit dem andern Evangelisten angezeigt / auff das er darthäte / wie der Haß und Neid wieder die Wahrheit so groß und giftig sey / und wie Christus unschuldiglich angeklagt / und zum Tode verdammt werde: Denn die Jüden klagen Christum nicht allein fälschlich an / sondern setzen sich auch selbst in Gerichte / und stellen das Urtheil. Wer hat ihnen solches befohlen? Es gebühret Pilato / ach Römischen Recht / das Urtheil zustellen / aber sie / die Jüden sind zugleich Kläger und Richter.”

repetition of this theme [“Kreuzige”] evokes an impression of a large crowd.” (122) Or “The rapid, consonant-heavy declamation of the “Bist du nicht,” which occurs forty-six times in seventeen measures, generates the impression of Peter being surrounded by a crowd of people questioning him.” (104) Scholars of John’s gospel have pointed out that there is no reference in his passion narrative to “the crowd,” and it makes a difficult problem worse to write in these terms.

Even more troubling is some of the authors’ own language. In writing about “Wäre dieser nicht ein Übeltäter” they offer “When asked what charges they are bringing against Jesus, the chief priests respond with a threatening and aggressive manner in the first turba chorus of the movement. The chorus begins with fast-paced, homophonic music that soon gives way to a cacophony of voices singing polyphonically. It is almost as if the chief priests are shouting over each other in their desire to be heard and condemn Jesus.” (112) Language like this (“cacaphony,” “shouting over each other”) perpetuates an ugly acoustic stereotype of Jews. It would be one thing to suggest that Bach might well have been brought up on this conception and that it ended up reflected in his setting. But here and throughout, this sort of interpretation is put forward as an accomplishment of the composer’s music. This kind of language has no place in responsible commentary on Bach.

A work as culturally and musically complex as Bach’s *St. John Passion* is in need of constant reflection and consideration. Performers and audiences in the twenty-first century require good guides to those processes. But they need them from authors whose theological and musical understanding of the work is comprehensive. This book does not come fully up to that standard. It is admirable as a labor of love, but it does not stem from the sort of expertise that would make its assertions convincing.

New J.C. Bach Editions



Johann Christian Bach: Operas and Dramatic Works. The Packard Humanities Institute has published first three volumes in the new edition, *Johann Christian Bach: Operas and Dramatic Works: Carattaco* (edited by Jason B. Grant), and *Lucio Silla* and *Zanaida* (edited by Paul Cornelson). For more information, see jcbach.org.

STAUFFER AND BUTLER HONORED

Lynn Edwards Butler

At the biennial meeting (“Global Bach”) held at Emory University September 26–29, 2024, Professors Gregory Butler and George Stauffer were named Honorary Lifetime Members of the American Bach Society. ABS President Daniel Melamed presented them with framed certificates in recognition of and appreciation for their lifelong dedication to the investigation of Johann Sebastian Bach’s music.

Gregory Butler is Professor Emeritus of Music at the School of Music, University of British Columbia in Vancouver, where he taught for more than forty years. After graduating from McGill University, he earned M.A. and Ph.D. degrees from the University of Toronto, did post-graduate work at Columbia University, and was later a Von Humboldt fellow in Berlin for two years. He is author of *J. S. Bach’s Clavier-Übung III: The Making of a Print* and numerous articles on the first editions of Bach’s works. He has also written extensively on Bach’s concertos. A member of the American Bach Society since its founding in 1988, he has served as General Editor, on the Editorial Board, and as President (2004–2008).

George B. Stauffer is Distinguished Professor of Music History and Dean Emeritus of the Mason Gross School of the Arts at

Rutgers University. Educated at Dartmouth College and Columbia University, he has published eight books on Baroque music and the life and works of J.S. Bach and has also contributed to *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, *Organ Yearbook*, *Bach-Jahrbuch*, and many other American, European, and Asian publications. In addition, he has written for *The New York Times*, *New York Review of Books*, and *The Weekly Standard*. A member of the American Bach Society since its founding in 1988, he has served as the Society’s General Editor, on the Advisory Board, and as President (from 1996–2000).

Saluting the special relationship between Butler and Stauffer—who have been colleagues and friends for 52 years, since they were graduate students together at Columbia University—each toasted the other.

Butler noted their shared interests and convergences around their work on the publisher Breitkopf, the theorist Johann Mattheson, and on J. S. Bach’s *Klavierübung III*, and their association as co-editors along with Mary Greer of *About Bach*, a collection of essays honoring their joint mentor, Christoph Wolff. Two bookends mark Stauffer’s almost half-a-century career: his doctoral dissertation, *The Organ Preludes of Johann Sebastian Bach*, published in 1980, and his magnum opus, *J. S. Bach: The Organ Works*, published in 2024. But these important works flank a host of other publications, including: *The World of Baroque Music* (2006); *Organ Technique: Modern and Early* (2000, together with George Ritchie); *Bach: Mass in B Minor* (1997); and *J. S. Bach as*



Organist: His Instruments, Music, and Performance Practices (1985, together with Ernest May). Stauffer has been active not only as a music scholar, editor, and reviewer, but as a public speaker and organist; he served as University Organist and Chapel Music Director at Columbia University for 22 years. Butler concluded: “It is no exaggeration when I say that George Stauffer has no peer among researchers working on Bach’s organ works.”

Stauffer pointed to Butler’s articles on the fantasia as musical image, musical rhetoric, the projection of *affect* in Baroque dance, and Bach’s *galant* idioms in the *Musical Offering*, and to his more recent consideration of issues of style in Bach’s concerto writing, looking at the question of genre in Brandenburg Concerto 4, the aesthetic and pedagogical context of the Italian concerto, and the form of the Prelude to English Suite No. 3. Recognizing Butler’s “special relationship” with Bach’s original prints, Stauffer described how, beginning in 1973, Butler began, little by little, to bring into question the views held by Georg Kinsky, the authoritative source up until that time. Butler’s essays on the engravers and engraving process of the Schemelli Gesangbuch, the Art of Fugue, the Six Partitas, and the Canonic Variations on Von Himmel hoch culminated with his full-length study on the Klavier-Übung III (1990). With his “startling insights” into the engraving and printing of the Musical Offering, Canonic Variations, the Art of Fugue, and other works, Stauffer concluded, Butler “de-sanctified Kinsky and provided Bach scholarship with an entirely new view of the Bach prints.”

Stauffer and Butler are the seventeenth and eighteenth individuals to be named Honorary Lifetime Members of the Society.

BACH: Journal of the Riemenschneider Bach Institute (March 2025)

Reports

David Yearsley, “R. I. P.—P. D. Q.”

Paul Corneilson, “Reflections on Editing the Complete Works of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach”

Articles

Daniel R. Melamed, “J. S. Bach, Multiple ‘Parallel Proportions,’ and US Tax Enforcement”

David Schulenberg, “Biffi, Bach, and the Violin Sonata in E Minor BWV 1023”

Gregory Butler, “Venetian Three-Voice Ripieno String Scoring in J. S. Bach’s Early Concerted Works”

Zoltán Göncz, “A ‘New’ J. S. Bach Chorale-Aria? ‘Sende, Herr, den Segen ein’ from ‘Ihr Tore zu Zion’ BWV 193”

Reviews

Bettina Varwig, *Music in the Flesh: An Early Modern Musical Physiology*, review by Daniel Villega Véllez

Michael Fuchs and Bradley Jenson, *Bach’s St. John Passion for the Twenty-First Century: Musical and Theological Perspectives*, review by Mark A. Peters

George B. Stauffer, *J. S. Bach: The Organ Works*, review by James A. Brokaw II

ABS Virtual Book Club

The ABS is pleased to announce the return of our members-only virtual book club in Spring 2025, hosted by Carrie Tipton. The Spring 2025 book club pick is *Rethinking Bach*, a collection of essays edited by Dr. Bettina Varwig. The book club will meet twice this spring via Zoom: once with Dr. Varwig, a conversation that will include pre-screened questions from book club members, and once on our own to wrap up our discussion of the book. Our Zoom meeting with Dr. Varwig will be **Friday March 28 at noon Central**. Zoom links will be sent later this spring, along with the date and time for the next meeting; if you are interested but have not yet signed up for the book club, email tipton@americanbachsociety.org.



Teri Noel Towe (1948–2025)

Stephen Roe

There was no one in the Bach world remotely like Teri Noel Towe, who died at his home in Dutchess County, NY, on 3 February 2025. Trusts and estates lawyer, host of radio music programs from his college years till hours before his death; musicologist, record collector extraordinaire and art historian. His trenchant and firmly held views, often delivered with a specifically ordered Tanqueray martini (woe betide if the barman reached for the wrong bottle), were aired in a gruff and emphatic manner, which brooked no counter argument.

Behind this combative front existed a kindly and good-humored man, whose stern, bearded face was more often than not wreathed in smiles and laughter. Indeed, he was paradoxical in looks and manner. While Teri enjoyed dressing up—he was a regular at Princeton reunions in costume as the bewigged founder Jeremy Belcher—he was sometimes less particular about his appearance, sporting a well-served overcoat covered with political badges and topped with a baseball cap, without reference to America's future greatness. In later years, his walking-frame was adorned with a variety of plastic bags, some containing food; others might have some old Handel scores, and once or twice his Bach autograph. He was not everyone's idea of a snappily-dressed New York attorney. But sharp lawyer he was and was liked and admired by many clients dealing with difficult estates involving works of art. As such he was a regular visitor to antique fairs and dealers, and he had an eye for good furniture and fine things.

Among his greatest talents was his gift of friendship, showing tremendous generosity and loyalty to his friends and family, whom he clearly adored. Anniversaries of births, marriages and deaths of his beloved parents Kenneth and Betty (née McCarn) were regularly posted on Facebook. Teri was their youngest child, a late addition to the family of three sons. His education began at Deerfield Academy, MA, and later at Princeton, where he studied Art History and then Law at the University of Virginia, Charlottesville. At Princeton he began his long career as a record program host.

Ever present in his conversation were his early Bach heroes: Wanda Landowska, Pau Casals, Rosalyn Tureck, and especially William H. Scheide of Princeton, practically a second father and life-long friend. Teri was a regular visitor to Library Place, where Bill presided beneath the Haussmann Bach portrait, now in the Bach-Archiv Leipzig. Teri was extremely moved when Bill presented him with a manuscript list of Handel's works in the hand of King George III, which he prized. Teri was an enthusiastic supporter of lost or unfashionable causes. In his advocacy of Richard III as a misunderstood monarch, he was joined by Bill Scheide's widow, Judith, who was another great friend of his later years. Teri

was also an influential voice in the world of Bach iconography, though not all his hypotheses achieved general acceptance.

Teri fostered and encouraged many young performers and was appreciated by generations of musicians in America and Europe. He had a wide range of friends from all walks of life, including his partner Nando, with whom he enjoyed dining in various old-fashioned New York restaurants. Teri lived through the AIDS years and lost many treasured friends, whom he never forgot, faithfully commemorating them on Facebook.

Apart from his collecting, Teri will be remembered for his radio years. His love of Bach was marked by Christmas spectaculars, when he played wall-to-wall Bach for several hours, prefiguring the blanket treatment of individual composers to be adopted by the BBC many years later. He marked the recent change of government in Washington by playing an uninterrupted sequence of requiems.



Stephen Roe and Teri Noel Towe

Most of Teri's career was based in Manhattan, living in an apartment with reinforced floors to bear the weight of his important record collection, containing many early recordings of Bach and Handel, some unique. But his greatest acquisition was a manuscript continuo part of the Cantata *Christ unser Herr zum Jordan kam*, BWV 7, annotated by Bach, which he purchased at auction, of which he was rightly proud. He showed it to anyone who might be interested, enjoying the joy and surprise it gave to his unsuspecting guest. I was the fortunate witness of this on a number of occasions at Teri's favorite French restaurant, *Le veau d'or*. Despite my initial alarm at the manuscript being flourished between the soup spoons, Teri's palpable enjoyment of these moments, sharing his love of Bach with his friends, was a joy to observe, an ultimate mark of his generosity and friendship. As he wrote at the death of his heroes on Facebook: *Ave atque vale*.

ABS Grant Winners

Kailan Rubinoff has received a **Diversity Grant Award** to fund continued research on Thomas Höft's *Utrechter Passion* and its relationship to JS Bach's *St. John Passion*.

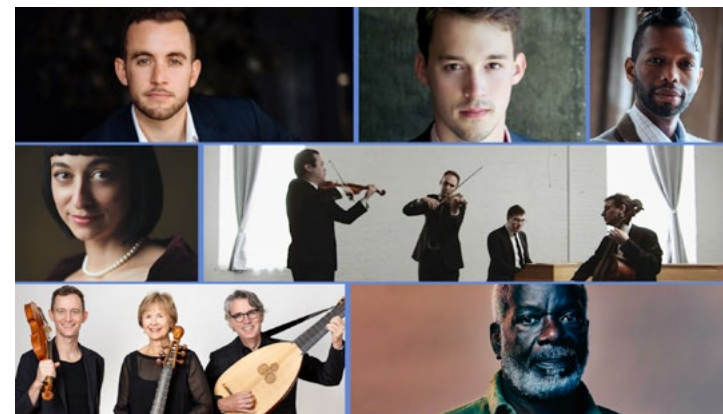
Nicholas Phan has received a **Diversity Grant Award** to fund the ongoing multimedia project *Bach 52*.

Sashi Ayyangar has received a **Scheide Grant** to support archival research into cantata compositional methods of key J. S. Bach predecessors and contemporaries.

Hélène Papadopoulous has received a **Scheide Grant** to support archival research into the role of Rosalyn Tureck in Bach reception.

Ethan Draper, organ student at Lebanon Valley College, has been selected as the recipient of the 2025 **Brokaw Grant** to fund summer research at the RBI.

Announcements



Led by Artistic Director Bill Barclay, **Concert Theatre Works** has created a first-ever staged production of J. S. Bach's long-lost *Markus Passion*, commissioned for the Oregon Bach Festival. Chatham Baroque is excited to partner with Concert Theatre Works and NYC based ensemble The Sebastians for a world-premiere of this important work as reconstructed by Malcolm Bruno and published by Breitkopf & Härtel. With an ensemble comprising 14 players and 4 singers dramatically supporting acclaimed actor Joseph Marcell as the Evangelist, this musical treasure is brought to life in a gripping theatrical format. Performances include April 11, 2025 at Carnegie Music Hall, Pittsburgh, with The Sebastians, Chatham Baroque & Joseph Marcell, presented by Chatham Baroque; April 13, 2025 at Corpus Christi Church in New York City, with The Sebastians, Chatham Baroque & Joseph Marcell,

presented by Music Before 1800. Information on these and other performances may be found at <https://concerttheatreworks.com/portfolio/markus-passion/>.



The **New Seattle Bach Festival** presented its debut concerts in January 2025. Founded in 2024 by renowned baroque violinist Tekla Cunningham, The Seattle Bach Festival serves the Seattle area with great performances of the masterworks of J.S. Bach and pearls of the Baroque. From large scale works like oratorios, cantatas, and passions to the chamber music and solo works, we offer you a portal into a world of beauty, passion, joy, learning and community. We believe the music of Bach and the Baroque has the power to nourish hearts, open minds and convene community. For information on upcoming concerts in April and May, visit <https://seattlebachfestival.org/>.

The **Bach Society of Saint Louis** (BSSL) will bring its 84th season to a close with a vibrant lineup of concerts and community events during the 2025 St. Louis Bach Festival in April and May. The festival offers something for everyone to enjoy with concerts set across the city. Highlights of the festival include all six of Bach's Brandenburg Concertos, Bach at the Bistro and the Mass in B Minor. For tickets or more information, visit <https://bachsociety.org/festival>



Mark Moskovitz announces the publication of his historical novel, *Eyes of Bach* (FriesenPress), in which a cello student, Carl Barth, searches for truth as he comes to grips with his teacher J. S. Bach's death after an eye operation at the hands of an English surgeon. Moskovitz transports the reader into the milieu of 18th-century Europe—its cobblestone streets, music-filled churches, and a vividly imagined Bach household.

MEMBER NEWS

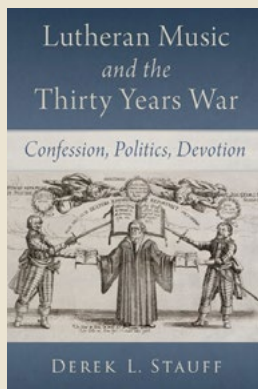
Willis Bodine, University of Florida Professor of Music emeritus, gave two presentations on his discovery of use by Western composers of the sequence of prime numbers. As part of the January UF 2025 Organ Centennial, he discussed examples from five centuries of organ literature. For the School of Music Creative Lecture Series in March, he presented a new completion of *Contrapunctus XIV, Kunst der Fuge*, based on the primes sequence and earlier research. Videos and transcripts are available on his website, www.WillisBodine.com.

Michael Marissen is pleased to announce the publications of his monograph *Bach tegen de Moderniteit*, transl. by Dingeman van Wijnen (Amersfoort: Uitgeverij Van Wijnen, 2025), and of his editions *Johann Sebastian Bach, Sonata in A major for Flute and Obligato Harpsichord, BWV 1032: With a Historically Informed Reconstruction of the Missing Music in the First Movement* (São Paulo: Instant Harmony, 2025) and *Johann Sebastian Bach, Trio Sonata in C major for Alto Recorder, Violin, and Basso Continuo: Reconstruction of the Source for the Sonata in A major for Flute and Obligato harpsichord, BWV 1032* (São Paulo: Instant Harmony, 2025).



John Setterlund is pleased to announce the new 2nd edition of his book *Bach Through the Year: The Church Music of Johann Sebastian Bach and the Revised Common Lectionary* (Kirk House, 2024). ISBN: 9781959681632.

Derek Stauff announced the publication of his book *Lutheran Music and the Thirty Years War: Confession, Politics, and Devotion* (Oxford University Press, 2025) ISBN: 9780197749425



An article by **Russell Stinson**, “Recataloging Bach’s Organ Works: The New BWV,” was published in the February 2025 issue of *The American Organist*.



DIRECTIONS TO CONTRIBUTORS

Bach Notes is published twice yearly (fall and spring) and mailed to all members and subscribers. Submissions for the fall issue are due by 1 September, and should be in Microsoft Word, employ endnotes, and follow the style guidelines of *The Chicago Manual of Style*. Submissions should be sent to Rebekah Franklin at bachnotes@americanbachsociety.org.

THE AMERICAN BACH SOCIETY

EXECUTIVE BOARD

Lynn Edwards Butler (Vancouver, BC), President
Carrie Allen Tipton (Vanderbilt University), Vice-President
Derek Stauff (Hillsdale College), Secretary-Treasurer

ADVISORY BOARD

Term ending 2026

Christina Fuhrmann (Baldwin-Wallace University/Riemenschneider Bach Institute)
Tanya Kevorkian (Millersville University)
Daniel R. Melamed (Bloomington Bach Cantata Project)
Andrea Moore (Smith College)

Term ending 2028

Stephen Crist (Emory University)
Ellen Exner (Philadelphia Orchestra)
Dana Marsh (Indiana University/Washington Bach Consort)
Reginald Sanders (Kenyon College)

EDITORIAL BOARD

Steven Zohn (Temple University), General Editor
Rebekah Franklin (Oklahoma Baptist University), Editor, *Bach Notes*
Evan Cortens (Mount Royal University), Web Editor
Sashi Ayyangar (Northwestern University), Social Media Editor

Term ending 2026

Matthew Dirst (University of Houston)
Andrew Talle (Northwestern University)
Carrie Allen Tipton (Vanderbilt University)
Bettina Varwig (Cambridge University)

Term ending 2028

Daniel Boomhower (Dumbarton Oaks)
Laura Buch (Packard Humanities Institute)
Jason B. Grant (Packard Humanities Institute)
Mark Peters (Trinity Christian College)

MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

Founded in 1972 as a chapter of the Neue Bachgesellschaft, the American Bach Society supports the study, performance, and appreciation of the music of Johann Sebastian Bach. Annual dues are \$50 (\$25 for students). Membership information and application materials are available online at the website listed below. Interested persons may also contact Derek Stauff, Hillsdale College, 33 E College St. Hillsdale, MI 49242, USA, or treasurer@americanbachsociety.org.

© 2025 by The American Bach Society
All rights reserved

Please visit the ABS website
www.americanbachsociety.org
for concert and festival listings