

BACH NOTES

NEWSLETTER OF THE AMERICAN BACH SOCIETY

The World Premiere of a Staged Bach Markus Passion

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Attempts to reconstruct Bach’s lost music for the *St. Mark Passion* (BWV 247) have taken many forms, but the concert staging premiered by The Sebastians, Chatham Baroque, and the actor Joseph Marcell on April 11 was remarkably effective, both musically and as live theater. The premiere took place at Carnegie Music Hall in Pittsburgh, PA, where Chatham Baroque is based, and a second performance followed on April 13 at New York’s Corpus Christi Church. Since then, this Concert Theatre Works production has been given in the UK with John Butt’s Dunedin Consort and on the US West Coast with Portland Baroque and the Oregon Bach Festival,

which commissioned the production. I attended the Pittsburgh premiere and came away with a renewed appreciation for the dramatic power of Bach’s Passions, including this skillful and sensitive reconstruction in the hands of superb performers.

Bill Barclay’s staged concert production took the 2019 Breitkopf score edition by Malcom Bruno as its starting point. In this reconstruction, Bruno combined Bach’s planned parody choruses and arias from the *Trauer Ode* (BWV 198) with his chorale settings (reducing the unusually large number cued in Picander’s libretto) and arias and sinfonias borrowed from Bach’s cantatas. The distinctive instrumentation for winds,

In This Issue:

The World Premiere of a Staged Bach Markus Passion	1
Remembering Joan Lippincott	4
Remembering Mary Oleskiewicz.	5
Bachfest Leipzig 2025	7
Announcements.	11
Member News.	12

strings, two obbligato violas da gamba, and two theorbo-family lutes also recalls the *Trauer Ode*, and Chatham Baroque and The Sebastians combined forces to form a tight and luminous ensemble of single strings, winds, gambas, and theorbos with organ continuo. Likewise, the four vocal soloists (Pascale Beaudin, soprano; Cody Bowers, countertenor; James Reese, tenor; and Jonathan Woody, bass-baritone) sang one-to-a-part during the chorales and choruses, forming a nimble quartet whose intimate expressivity was particularly effective in the chorales (especially “Jesu ohne Missetat”).

While there have been other performances from this edition, it has never been given in a concert staging as the *St. Matthew* and *John Passions* have, partly because of the practical challenges presented by the loss of Bach’s recitatives and *turba* choruses.



Bruno’s reconstruction leaves the Evangelist’s Gospel narration as a spoken role, performed in English in this production by the talented Shakespearean actor Marcell, best known to American audiences for his role as Jeffrey on the *Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*. Under Barclay’s direction, most of the musical performers also had speaking or silent acting roles. The soloists took on the spoken Gospel dialogue parts with Marcell/The Evangelist, and those who were not singing during the arias acted silently, alongside mobile obbligato instrumentalists. According to Bruno’s program note for the premiere, these performance decisions were influenced by Jonathan Miller’s staged, English-language *St. Matthew Passion* that was revived at London’s National Theatre in 2011.

In contrast with the English narration, the arias, choruses, and chorales were sung in Picander’s German verse, and this made for an interestingly multilingual experience that seemed to welcome new and seasoned Bach listeners alike. The soloists were necessarily miked in order to be heard over the ensemble in the Carnegie Music Hall. After an initial problem with Bowers’ sound during the first alto aria, “Falsche Welt,” which made it hard to hear him, his microphone was fixed, and he sang ably for the rest of the performance. Indeed, each of the soloists sang exquisitely, especially as the performance went on. One of the highlights of Part I was the combined musical performance and blocking during the tenor aria, “Erbarme dich,” during which the singer Reese and flutist Emi Ferguson both interacted with the non-singing soloist Beaudin,

who enacted Peter’s remorse when he realizes he has betrayed Jesus. When the A section returns with the da capo, the flutist and tenor mimetically comforted Beaudin/Peter with their music, essentially answering the singer’s plea for mercy with an act of care.

While it would be wonderful to get to hear Bach’s composed recitatives, the performers made the most of the spoken parts, especially Marcell’s magnificent Evangelist. In fact, in one instance I found I preferred the spoken performance: at the key moment



when the soloists’ chorus substituted calls of “Crucify him!” for the missing *turba* chorus at the court of Pontius Pilate in Part II. As Michael Marissen (1998) has pointed out, Bach’s choruses setting the Israelites’ calls for Jesus’s crucifixion in Mark 15:13–14—especially the *St. John Passion*’s “Kreuzige” choruses—are “terrifying” and may reinforce contemporary anti-Semitic tropes. It is worth noting that this premiere took place not two miles from the site of the 2018 Tree of Life synagogue shooting. Both my companion, who tensed as the “Crucify” verses approached, and I couldn’t help but hear the verses in that context. From my perspective, the decision to have the soloists’ chorus semi-chant “Crucify him!” rather than sing it, whether in a Bach parody or a newly composed setting, was a good one. The chorus’s performance was chilling, but it delivered the words in a way that bared their ugliness without clothing them in Bach’s brilliant music.

Several features of this performance made the crucifixion portion of the narrative particularly moving. Marcell delivered the words of Jesus’s death throes, “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?” as a desperate cry, followed by the ritornello for the soprano aria “Welt und



Himmel” (from Cantata 120a) featuring Andrew Fouts’ nuanced violin obbligato. In addition to Beaudin’s beautifully ornamented delivery, I appreciated her and Fouts’ light acting during this number: the actor-singers and instrumentalists listened to Beaudin’s performance diegetically, and Fouts directed his final ritornello to Marcell’s Jesus. Likewise, Bruno’s inclusion of Bach’s bass aria with obbligato oboe d’amore, “Es ist vollbracht,” from Cantata BWV 159 worked very well in this performance. It is thematically apt, of course, but hearing it performed superbly by Woody’s bass-baritone in dialogue with Priscilla Herreid’s oboe at this apex of the passion drama was comforting. Similarly, including the sinfonia “Christ lag in Todesbanden” in Part I was a nice touch of this reconstruction, as it audibly drew intertextual connections with the Easter cantata (BWV 4) at that moment.



In his book *Hearing Bach’s Passions* (Oxford 2005/2016), Daniel Melamed reminds us that in Bach’s time “passions were freely adapted to local needs” and that, while they were religious music, “they were not sacrosanct.” In that spirit, one of the things I liked most about this production was the balance it struck between offering a historically plausible reconstruction of BWV 247 and a creative, intimate experience of a Passion drama in Bach’s idiom. Its semi-staged, English-language narration paired with the musicians’ engaging and world-class performances was perfectly tuned to Pittsburgh.

New ABS Vice President

I am pleased to announce that **Matthew Dirst** has agreed to serve as Vice-President of the American Bach Society, completing the term begun by Carrie Tipton in September 2024. On behalf of the Executive and Advisory Boards, I extend our thanks to Carrie for her significant contributions to the Society—which include coordinating the Tiny Bach Concerts project and hosting the ABS Virtual Book Club. We are deeply grateful to Matthew for stepping into this important role mid-term, and we look forward to his leadership in the months ahead.

--Lynn Edwards Butler, President

Call for Proposals Biennial Meeting of the American Bach Society October 1–4, 2026 “Celebrating Bach”

The 2026 American Bach Society meeting will take place at Baldwin Wallace University (BW) in Berea, Ohio. BW is home to the first collegiate Bach Festival in the United States, the Riemenschneider Bach Institute (RBI), and *BACH: Journal of the Riemenschneider Bach Institute*. In recognition of BW’s long history of promoting Bach, the meeting will be centered around the idea of “celebrating Bach.” The ABS invites individual paper proposals (30 minutes) that critically investigate the past, present, and future of the many ways in which we celebrate Bach. Papers on all aspects of Bach research are welcome; preference will be given to those related to the conference theme. Topics related to this theme could include but are not limited to:

- Bach festivals, societies, museums, competitions, or websites
- Visual celebrations of Bach (monuments, postage stamps, films, etc.)
- Bach anniversaries
- Private and public collections of Bach’s works
- Publications, recording projects, or documentaries highlighting Bach
- Compositions inspired by Bach
- Bach celebrated in popular culture
- Bach as part of cultural or political celebrations
- The future of Bach celebrations and studies in a changing world

Please send your proposal as an abstract of up to 300 words emphasizing the results of research as a Word document [last name_first name.docx] to: vicepresident@americanbachsociety.org by January 15, 2026. Please include your name, institutional affiliation or city of residence, and email address, and indicate any audio, visual, or other needs for the presentation. Applicants will be notified of the program committee’s decision by March 1, 2026. Note that all papers will be given in-person; therefore the American Bach Society will offer subsidies for travel for papers accepted from scholars without institutional support.

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Remembering Joan Lippincott

With the passing of Joan Lippincott this past May, the organ world lost one of its star virtuosos, and the American Bach Society was deprived of a strong supporter and former member of the Advisory Board. A leading proponent of Bach's organ music, she was known for her performances of the greatest hits as well as more obscure works coming from the Bach circle.

Joan studied organ with the legendary teacher Alexander McCurdy, first at Westminster Choir College and then at the Curtis Institute of Music. She went on to become a master teacher herself, training generations of organists at Westminster, where she taught from 1960 to 1997 and served as head of the organ department from 1967 to 1994. She also served as Principal

University Organist at Princeton from 1993 to 2000. Joan enjoyed an extraordinarily successful career as a concert organist, represented by Karen McFarlane Artists, Inc., one of the top management firms for organists. She performed on many of the most prominent church and concert-hall instruments in the United States, including distinguished university organs at Yale, Harvard, Duke, Columbia, Stanford, and Princeton. She also toured widely in Europe, playing on historic instruments in Holland, Denmark, Germany, Sweden, Italy, France, and other countries.

Although she was trained in the romantic tradition and achieved wide recognition for her interpretations of the big nineteenth-century war horses, including Liszt's *Fantasia on Ad nos ad salutarem undam*



and Franck's *Grande Pièce Symphonique*, she came to embrace the organ revival movement of the 1970s and 1980s and became, in her own words, "a tracker-backer." Over the course of thirty years she proceeded to record large swaths of the Bach repertory on some of the nation's foremost modern instruments built on historic principles: the Taylor & Boody organ in St. Thomas Church in New York, the Fritts organs at Princeton Theological Seminary and the University of Notre Dame, the Flentrop organ at Duke University, and the Fritts-Richards organ at St. Alfonsus Church in Seattle. The works included the Orgel-Büchlein, the Leipzig Chorales, the Six Trio Sonatas, Clavier-Übung III, the Schübler Chorales, and most of the major preludes and fugues. Especially noteworthy were her pioneering recordings of the cantata sinfonias and the concerto transcriptions, which included her own

Joan Lippincott at the console of the Taylor & Boody pipe organ, Bower Chapel, Naples, Florida. Photograph: Donna Meneley

extravaganza solo organ arrangement of the Concerto in A Minor for Four Harpsichords, BWV 1065.

Joan was a strong supporter of the American Bach Society. In 1996 she became one of the first performers and one of the first women to join the Advisory Board, and the following year she teamed up with George Ritchie to produce the Society's only compact disc, *The Uncommon Bach: Johann Sebastian Bach Organ Works, Variants, Rarities, and Transcriptions*, recorded on the spectacular Fritts-Richards organ at St. Alphonsus Church. But this listing of Joan's accomplishments on many fronts does little to convey her remarkably warm and generous spirit. I first met Joan in Salt Lake City, where I was giving a Bach talk and she a masterclass and performance on the great Mormon Tabernacle organ. Over dinner afterward I experienced firsthand Joan's disarming charm and almost child-like enthusiasm for all things musical. That initial conversation led to a friendship of forty years and many collaborations. These included "Bach in the Big Apple," a series of eight concerts and discussions of Bach's organ works in New York City; a long run of Bach CDs with liner notes that supplemented her recordings; a memorable performance of the Jongen *Symphonie Concertante* at Columbia University with the Hunter Symphony

Orchestra, and many other projects. Joan was such a joy to work with—always upbeat, always elegant, always unflappable, always a consummate professional.

What also impressed me about Joan was the strong encouragement she gave to students. She once dropped by for lunch in New York when I was chapel organist at Columbia. It happened to be the day of the dress rehearsal for my undergraduate organ students, who were scheduled to play on the Thursday Noon Series the next day. Joan insisted on attending the rehearsal, despite the fact that these were just undergraduate liberal-arts beginners, and she attentively and patiently listened as the students made their way through Bach's Eight Short Preludes and Fugues, Rheinberger's Organ Trios, and other pedagogical pieces. When it was over, she thanked the students for sharing their work with her and then proceeded to give them a short pep talk on the importance of music and the way it enriches life, even for those headed for other fields. Her inspiring send-off was a performance in itself.

Joan Lippincott has left a permanent legacy in her recordings and multiple generations of students. But oh, how we will miss her!

George B. Stauffer, Rutgers University

Remembering Mary Oleskiewicz

Mary Oleskiewicz, known internationally not only as a flute player and music historian but also as a dancer and teacher of Argentine tango, died on June 26, 2025 at Beth Israel Deaconess Hospital in Plymouth, Mass., near her home in Carver. She was 59 and had been fighting cancer for several years.

Described by a reviewer as "one of the greatest baroque flutists of our time," Mary was the world's leading authority on the eighteenth-century German composer Johann Joachim Quantz. She also edited and wrote about music of the Bach family.

As a flutist, it was natural that Mary should have devoted much of her career to Quantz, whose name is well known to flute players, albeit for a single frequently performed concerto. Through three decades of work on unpublished music manuscripts, mostly in Germany, Mary settled issues of attribution and established a chronology for Quantz's hundreds of flute sonatas and concertos. She also showed, through first editions and recordings, that Quantz's works reveal a variety and an evolving compositional style worthy of comparison to those of his more famous contemporaries. Mary traveled the world to identify the eight or nine surviving instruments made by Quantz, which, as she demonstrated, differ subtly from one another while manifesting important developments in flute design and playing technique.

Mary recorded all of J. S. Bach's chamber music for the flute. She also edited the flute solos of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach,

second son of Johann Sebastian. In her dissertation and subsequent publications she revealed influences and relationships between Quantz and members of the Bach family. She also published ground-breaking findings about the music of Quantz's long-time employer King Frederick "the Great" of Prussia, who was a gifted amateur flutist and composer. Mary showed that previous scholars had seriously underestimated the flutes and flute music of Quantz and had failed to recognize C. P. E. Bach's privileged place in the royal Prussian musical establishment.

Mary was professor in the Performing Arts department at the University of Massachusetts Boston from 2001. Previously she served as curator and professor at the National Music Museum on the campus of the University of South Dakota. A fluent German speaker, she also taught at the University of the Arts in Berlin. Among her awards and honors were research fellowships from the Humboldt Foundation and the DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service) as well as first prizes in the National Flute Association's Baroque Flute Artist and Doctoral Dissertation competitions.

An Ohio native, Mary received her undergraduate degree at Youngstown State University, where she studied flute with Walter Mayhall. She earned her Master's degree at Case Western Reserve University, working with baroque flutist Sandra Miller, and her



Ph.D. at Duke University, where her dissertation adviser was Peter Williams.

Although few in number, Mary's recordings are among the most exquisite examples of eighteenth-century flute playing. They include two CDs of sonatas by Quantz, another of Quantz's flute concertos, and seven sonatas by King Frederick, recorded in the music room of his famous royal palace of Sanssouci. Nearly all of these are first recordings. Mary's most notable recording may be that of Quantz's quartets for flute and strings—six previously unknown works which she discovered in a Berlin archive. It was typical of Mary's persistence as a researcher that, having found clues to the existence of such pieces, she sifted through hundreds of manuscripts to find the quartets, which she then recorded and published in a scholarly edition. Similar persistence led to her investigation of twenty-five of Quantz's concertos, also considered lost, in a Russian library, two of which she later recorded.

During her student years Mary performed professionally not only as a classical flutist in the Cleveland area but on tour with the Australian popular singer Debbie Byrne. Her international career later took her to China, Germany, Mexico, and elsewhere; in Boston she performed with the Handel and Haydn Society, Newton

Baroque, and other area groups. Videos of some of her performances can be seen on YouTube, including a 2024 concert featuring the three quartets by C. P. E. Bach as well as a previously misattributed sonata by Quantz.

In addition to her activities as a classical musician, Mary was known internationally as a teacher of Argentine tango, which she performed and taught for over twenty years not only as a dancer but as a player of the bandoneón. She was also a prize-winning photographer whose work was displayed at the Plymouth Center for the Arts and other regional galleries.

A consummate scholar, musician, and teacher, Oleskiewicz drove herself to com-

plete even the most difficult tasks as thoroughly as possible. She amassed a collection of scans and facsimiles not only of all Quantz's five hundred compositions—most of them in multiple copies—but also many obscure works by his contemporaries. As a teacher, when faced with the challenge of offering courses on Latin American music and dance, she traveled to Argentina, Peru, Bolivia, and Cuba to study tango and learn to play indigenous flutes. Her recordings, elegant and expressive, reveal her insistence on precise intonation and fidelity to what we know of historical instruments and practices—much of it gained through her own research.

Mary's magisterial paper on Quantz sources will appear in the proceedings of a 2023 Berlin conference at which she was keynote speaker. Not yet commercially released are her recordings of J. S. Bach's chamber music with flute. An edition of Quantz's concertos and other compositions was in progress at her death, as was a book on Quantz's music; these projects will be carried on by colleagues.

David Schulenberg
August 4, 2025

BACHFEST LEIPZIG 2025

YO TOMITA

(Queen's University, Belfast)



1. Collegium Musicum performing *Die Kunst der Fuge* at the Thomaskirche - Bachfest Leipzig Gert Mothes

Bachfest Leipzig 2025 took place from June 12 to 22 and was organized around the theme of “Transformation.” The idea resonated with one of the most enduring aspects of Bach’s creativity: his continual rethinking and reshaping of musical material. Whether revising earlier compositions, adapting the works of others, or integrating diverse stylistic influences, Bach treated transformation not as exception but as method. This review explores how that idea surfaced across a wide spectrum of concerts—from historically informed readings to radical reimaginings.

The theme was also examined in a public lecture series (June 16–19), presented by scholars from the Bach-Archiv Leipzig. Covering topics from parody and arrangement (Wollny), Passion adaptations (Blanken), and compositional models (Koska) to Bach’s evolving reception (Hausmann), the lectures framed

transformation not just as a creative act but as an ongoing process—historical, interpretive, and personal.

Opening Day: From Ceremony to Contemplation

The festival began at 5:00 p.m. on June 12 in the Thomaskirche with a program that linked Leipzig tradition to the theme of transformation. The Thomanerchor and Gewandhausorchester, directed by Andreas Reize, were joined by organist Johannes Lang, who opened with Liszt’s *Prelude and Fugue on B–A–C–H* (LW E3)—a Romantic homage that reframes Bach’s musical monogram. Bach’s *Sinfonia in D minor* (from BWV 146) followed, vividly spotlighting the organ as a concertante voice, and *Tönet, ihr Pauken!* (BWV 214)—later repurposed in the *Christmas Oratorio*—was delivered with festive brilliance. The program closed with the Kyrie–Gloria Mass in B Minor (BWV 232.2). While this performance lacked

expressive cohesion, it laid a foundation for more compelling renderings of the Mass heard later in the festival.

At 8:00 p.m., pianist Jan Čmejla, winner of the 2025 Bach-Wettbewerb, gave a recital at the Gewandhaus. The *D major Partita* (BWV 828) was played with clarity and imagination; repeats were sensitively varied, and the Gigue sparkled. The *Chromatic Fantasia and Fugue* was less persuasive—the Fantasia hesitant, the Fugue needing stronger direction—but Čmejla showed interpretive promise.

The day concluded at 10:30 p.m. back at the Thomaskirche with *Die Kunst der Fuge* by Collegium Musicum '23. Performed on original 1729 Hoffmann instruments, framed by organ chorales played by Lang, and unfolding just steps from Bach's grave, the event was steeped in historical resonance. (Photo 1) The performance emphasized continuity over contrast, drawing the listener inward. The final fugue remained unfinished, its silence eloquent. The concluding chorale offered stillness and closure—a quiet threshold into the ten days ahead.

The Goldberg Variations transformed

One of the most musically and emotionally fulfilling events of this year's Bachfest took place on June 17 at 5:00 p.m. in the Mendelssohn-Saal of the Gewandhaus, where the ensemble Nevermind—Anna Besson (traverso), Louis Creac'h (violin), Robin Pharo (viola da gamba), and Jean Rondeau (harpsichord and organ)—performed their transcription of the *Goldberg Variations* (BWV 988). Premiered in 2023, this version reimagines Bach's architectural masterpiece for quartet with remarkable sensitivity and inventiveness—rooted in historical practice yet alive with expressive freedom. (Photo 2)

The arrangement created an appealing timbral landscape. Played on period instruments, the music spoke with natural clarity and a freshness of color. Each voice remained distinct, yet the blend was seamless. The opening Aria, led by flute, immediately established the interpretive tone: its gently ornamented line evoked the coulé-inflected elegance of Bach's flute writing in works like BWV 1035.



2. The *Goldberg Variations* in the Mendelssohn-Saal - Bachfest Leipzig Gert Mothes

What followed was a continuous sequence of expressive vignettes. Slower variations, such as Variation 17, unfolded with finely shaped bowing and subtle shading. Fast movements brought remarkable ensemble precision; Variation 7 sparkled with rhythmic vitality, while Variation 20, with semiquaver motion distributed across the upper voices, shimmered with quiet brilliance. As the cycle advanced, emotional weight accumulated. Variation 25—the so-called “black pearl”—was focused intensely inward, followed by increasingly extroverted textures that led to the exuberant Quodlibet. Its joy felt both playful and cathartic, shared between performers and audience. In the final Aria da capo, time seemed briefly suspended: a return not just to the beginning, but to a place transformed by what had been experienced. Rarely has a reimagining of this iconic keyboard cycle achieved such authenticity, depth, and coherence. It was a transformation in the truest sense: faithful yet new, intimate yet expansive.

A Transformed Passion: Rediscovering Bach's 1725 *St. John*

If the *Goldberg Variations* revealed transformation as introspective renewal, the 1725 version of the *St. John Passion* (BWV 245.2) showed how rethinking structure and emphasis could offer an alternative theological and musical vision. Presented by La Cetra Barockorchester and Vokalensemble Basel under Andrea Marcon, the concert took place on Sunday evening, June 15, in the Nikolaikirche—a historically incongruous venue, as Bach's 1725 performance took place exactly 300 years earlier in the Thomaskirche. Yet despite this, the evening emerged as one of the most spiritually resonant of the festival.

This version differs significantly from the better-known 1724 and 1749 iterations. “O Mensch, bewein dein Sünde groß” replaces “Herr, unser Herrscher” as the opening; “Christe, du Lamm Gottes” concludes the work. Several arias are substituted or newly introduced. The result is more than revision—it is reorientation. The emphasis shifts toward personal guilt and inward struggle, with a more varied and complex sonic landscape.

Marcon's direction was measured and lucid, favoring balance and shape over overt dramatization. Chorales were taken at steady tempi, cadences gently expanded without affectation. The pacing avoided theatrical rubato, instead allowing the music to unfold naturally. At several points—particularly in movements 14 and 28—soloists remained in front of the orchestra after their arias, holding position while the choir sang the following chorales. This created a moment of formal stillness and inward contemplation before they returned to the choir. These small choices lent the whole performance coherence and gravitas. (Photo 3)

The vocal cast was uniformly strong. Christian Wagner, unusually singing both the role of Jesus and the bass arias, became the expressive anchor. His “Mein teurer Heiland” (mvt. 32) was sung with warmth and conviction, but it was the nearly whispered “Es ist vollbracht!” (mvt. 29) that haunted: a chilling moment of suspended stillness.



3. The 1725 *St. John Passion* in the Nikolaikirche - Bachfest Leipzig Gert Mothes

Jakob Pilgram was a poised and articulate Evangelist, though signs of fatigue surfaced toward the end. Miriam Feuersinger's performance deepened as the *Passion* progressed. Her "Ich folge dir gleichfalls" (mvt. 9) was elegant and rhythmically alert; in "Zerfließe, mein Herze" (mvt. 35), her transparent tone and precisely shaped phrasing created one of the evening's most affecting moments.

Three arias unique to this version were of particular interest. In my 2008 Bachfest review (*Bach Notes* 10), I had speculated that "Zerschmettert mich" and "Ach, windet euch nicht so" may have been later removed due to practical concerns. This performance invited a re-evaluation. "Zerschmettert mich" was sung with conviction and expressive drive. "Ach, windet euch nicht so," though vocally demanding, achieved dramatic tension and persuasive impact. These no longer appeared as dispensable curiosities but emerged as integral to the work's expressive and theological message.

The orchestra played with unity and detail, with especially fine contributions from viola da gamba, viola d'amore, and oboes da caccia. The choir maintained rhythmic precision and expressive focus, particularly in the crowd scenes, which were vivid but never uncontrolled.

This was not a performance shaped by spectacle or commemorative flair. Its strength lay in restraint, sincerity, and interpretive depth. The 1725 *St. John Passion* was revealed not as a historical detour, but as a compelling alternative vision—bringing us closer to Bach's evolving imagination at a pivotal moment in his spiritual and musical life.

Bach Assimilated: Tracing Influence through Sound

Three concerts under the *Bach assimiliert* banner explored how Bach absorbed and reimagined the music of his European predecessors. The Capricornus Consort Basel gave two thoughtfully constructed programs at the Evangelisch Reformierte Kirche: the first (June 13, 2:00 p.m.) juxtaposed Reincken, Corelli, Couperin, and Marcello with Bach's responses; the second (June 14, same time) paired Vivaldi concertos with BWV 1060R and the solo cantata *Ich bin vergnügt mit meinem Glücke* (BWV 84). On June 21, Reinhard Goebel and Neues Bachisches Collegium Musicum traced similar ground, placing BWV 1064R in dialogue with works by Telemann, Albinoni, Vivaldi, and Prince Johann Ernst.

The first Capricornus concert stood out for conceptual clarity and stylistic sensitivity. Reincken's Sonata in A Minor (a model for BWV 965) was phrased with rhetorical elegance; Couperin's *La Convalescente* balanced inégal delicacy and expressive nuance. Bach's *Ich habe genug* (BWV 82.1), sung with quiet authority by Tomáš Král, offered a point of inward focus. The encore, "Es ist



4. Elina Albach and CONTINUUM performing *Missa Miniatura* in the Nikolaikirche - Bachfest Leipzig Gert Mothes

vollbracht” from BWV 159, concluded the sequence with touching restraint.

Goebel’s program demonstrated how Bach’s style emerged through active transformation rather than imitation. Telemann’s overture (TWV 55: Es 4) gained depth as it unfolded; Albinoni’s Sonata in D Minor projected dignified lyricism; Vivaldi’s RV 522 was sharp-edged and rhythmically tight. Bach’s Concerto for Three Violins (BWV 1064R) crowned the concert with drive and cohesion—an emphatic case for influence as creative impulse.

The Mass in B minor transformed

Arguably the most provocative performances of this year’s Bachfest took place on June 17 at 8:00 p.m. in the Nikolaikirche, where Elina Albach and her ensemble CONTINUUM presented *Missa Miniatura*—a radical reimagining of the *Mass in B Minor*, arranged for six solo voices and eight instruments including cornett, viola da gamba, and electric guitar. Spoken texts by Swiss poet Jürg Halter, drawn from his *Ein Zweifler spricht* (2022), were inserted between movements, disrupting the liturgical flow and reshaping the emotional and theological landscape of the work.

The performers were visually divided: instrumentalists to the left, vocalists to the right, with Albach positioned centrally at the organ. (Photo 4) The symmetry was striking, but the more consequential contrast lay in musical and theatrical direction. The re-scoring stripped away Bach’s grandeur, exposing fragility in its place. Some movements gained in intimacy—“Et incarnatus est” and “Crucifixus” stood out for their stillness and poise. Others felt diminished: “Laudamus te,” with electric guitar replacing the violin, was muted in affect; “Quoniam,” scored for flute and guitar, evoked chamber delicacy but lacked immediacy.

The vocal ensemble sang with polish and precision, but between movements adopted an informal presence—seated, drinking water, dressed casually. This blurring of rehearsal and performance appeared deliberate, part of a broader conceptual aim: to strip away ritual and confront something more exposed, more contemporary.

The result suggested an allegory of contemporary society—on one side, polished but emotionally distant elites; on the other, obedient workers with limited voice. All of this unfolded within a work traditionally associated with spiritual unity, now fractured by Halter’s interventions, which questioned belief and certainty. Whether critique, reflection, or both, the performance forced the listener to encounter the Mass through a human lens marked by doubt and disjunction.

Although some movements were omitted, reducing Bach’s music to around 80 minutes, the time saved was filled by five spoken interjections. For this listener, the message had already landed by “Et expecto.” By the end, the accumulation of concept and commentary risked overshadowing the music itself.

Bach’s Lost Passion Reimagined

Il Gardellino, directed by Alexander Grychtolik, gave an evocative performance of Bach’s “lost” Passion reconstruction at

the Nikolaikirche on June 18 at 8:00 p.m. Based on Picander’s 1725 libretto, Grychtolik’s oratorio-style reimagining offered a compelling glimpse into one of the more speculative corners of Bach scholarship. Eschewing an Evangelist or direct Gospel narrative, the work followed the Telemannian model, unfolding as a poetic meditation on Christ’s suffering through a sequence of arias, recitatives, and chorales.

The reconstruction wove together movements parodied from Bach’s extant works—particularly the *St. Matthew Passion* and various cantatas—with newly composed recitatives and arias. Though inevitably conjectural, the project is rooted in detailed stylistic analysis and shaped by the plausible hypothesis that ecclesiastical censorship may have prevented Bach from completing or performing such a Passion in 1725.

The musical execution was mixed. While the ensemble responded with sensitivity, the performance lacked consistent polish. The soloists brought expressive variety, but several of Grychtolik’s original arias struggled to match the structural integrity or harmonic fluency of the borrowed material. One exception was movement 27, “Nimm es nicht,” which stood out for its fluid pacing and emotional clarity—perhaps because it felt less like reconstruction and more like original utterance.

Authenticity will always remain elusive, but as a historically informed act of imaginative reconstruction, this performance succeeded in opening a space where scholarship and creativity could meet. Rather than fixing Bach’s output within a closed canon, it invited us to consider what might have been—and to reflect on the fragility and openness of the legacy he left behind.

Bach Medal Presentation – Marcel Ponsele

The 2025 Bach Medal was awarded to oboist Marcel Ponsele in a warm midday ceremony at the Altes Rathaus on Friday, June 20. Joined by Ton Koopman and long-time colleagues, Ponsele offered a musical tribute that celebrated the expressive potential of the baroque oboe in Bach’s music. Arias from BWV 82 and 159, along with the reconstructed concerto BWV 1060R, revealed the lyrical phrasing, tonal finesse, and unforced authority that have



5. Bach Medal Presentation at the Altes Rathaus - Bachfest Leipzig Gert Mothes

made him one of the instrument's most respected interpreters. The event, modest in scale but rich in sentiment, served as a fitting tribute to a lifetime of distinguished artistry. (Photo 5)

Closing Concert: Mass in B Minor, BWV 232.4

Ton Koopman brought the festival to a close with a cohesive and radiant performance of the *Mass in B Minor* on Sunday evening, June 22, in the Thomaskirche. With soloists Hana Blažiková, Maarten Engeltjes, Tilman Lichdi, and Klaus Mertens, the Amsterdam Baroque Orchestra & Choir delivered clarity of texture and expressive depth without excess. The choral sound was warm, the pacing assured, and the architecture of the work allowed to unfold naturally.

For this listener, it was not just the final concert, but a culminating moment—a return to unity after days of encountering Bach's music in fragments, reconstructions, and radical reimaginings. One of the last movements Bach composed, "Et incarnatus est," replaced earlier parodied material with a strikingly original setting, shaped by his late engagement with Pergolesi's *Stabat Mater* (BWV 1083). In Koopman's hands, this passage stood as a microcosm of the festival's theme: transformation not through rupture, but through reflective renewal. (Photo 6)



6. The *Mass in B Minor* at the Thomaskirche - Bachfest Leipzig Gert Mothes

Heard here in full—after its many echoes throughout the week—the *Mass in B Minor* emerged not as a monument, but as a living testament to Bach's imaginative synthesis. It was a deeply affirming close to ten days of exploration, challenge, and rediscovery.

Postscript.

Though outside the festival's central theme, the return of Sir John Eliot Gardiner (June 13) stood out. Leading *The Constellation* in a triptych of BWV 103, 12, and 146, he traced a dramatic arc from lament to joy with taut control and expressive force. Also notable was how Solomon's Knot vividly staged the Michaelmas cantata program (June 22), which brought theatrical flair and cohesion to their closing performance.

Announcements

Bach Perspectives Open Access

The first fourteen volumes of *Bach Perspectives* are now available open access on the ABS website thanks to a new subvention from the Monte fund. Inaugurated in 1994, *Bach Perspectives* is the leading English-language serial publication devoted to Bach studies. New volumes appear, on average, every other year, and feature cutting-edge research by top scholars in the field. Vols. 1–4 were published by the University of Nebraska Press. Beginning with volume 5, the series is published by the University of Illinois Press in ongoing collaboration with the American Bach Society. Visit www.bibliopen.org and search for the series or specific volume, or go to the ABS website (<https://americanbachsociety.org/perspectives.html>), which links to the individual volumes.

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Launched in 1995, *Bach Perspectives* has become the premier volumes in open access editions available for free to all users. In Volume One, Bach scholar Russell Stinson edits essays that work like the *Orgelbüchlein* and the First Brandenburg Concertos.

Contributors: James A. Brinkaw II, Eric T. Chalk, Stephen A. Ciolek

About the Author

Russell Stinson is an emeritus professor of music at Lyon College. His research focuses on the late Baroque and the Nineteenth Century to the Present.

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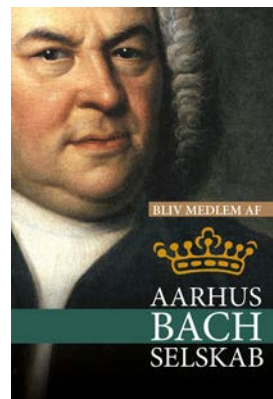
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Knud Svendsen and the Aarhus Bach Society send greetings from Denmark. In 1990 a group of Bach enthusiasts founded the Aarhus Bach Society wishing to bring the cantatas into focus. They have performed more than a hundred Bach cantatas, some in church concerts. Once a year during the annual Town Festival a cantata is sung in a liturgical setting, following Bach's tradition. This is possible thanks to enthusiastic choir members and close co-operation with members of the Symphony Orchestra. The Aarhus Bach Society is a co-operative member of The International Bach Society.

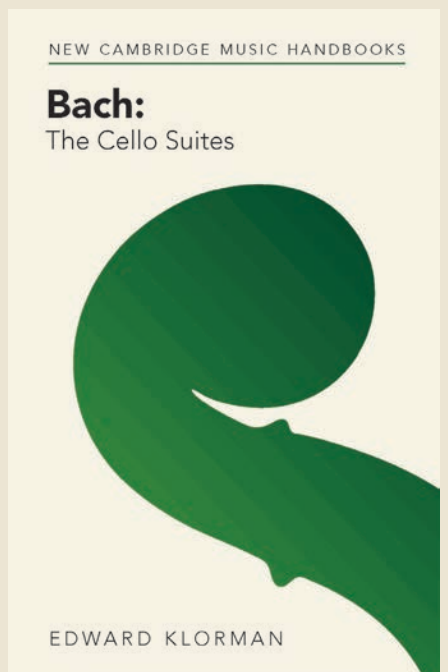


MEMBER NEWS

Paul Cornelson has been appointed to the Kuratorium of the Bach-Archiv Leipzig for a five-year term.

Tanya Kevorkian presented a paper on secular music at “Let there be Night: Musicking after Sunset in Early Modern Europe” at the University of Basel, September 4-5, 2025. The conference, part of the NightMuse SNSF project at the university’s Department of Musicology, directed by Hanna Walsdorf, included presentations by doctoral and post-doctoral students working with the project as well as outside scholars, and a lecture-concert with students at the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis. More information: <https://nightmuse.musikwissenschaft.philhist.unibas.ch/>

Edward Klorman is pleased to announce the publication of *Bach: The Cello Suites* (Cambridge University Press, 2025). ISBN 9781009054591. Further details available at www.bach-cello-suites.com. A 20% discount is available for orders placed directly with the publisher (use code BCS2025 at checkout).



H. Doug Matsuoka's *The Seventh Partita*, a novel in the form of a *ricercare*, currently available only as a Kindle ebook, will be offered in its first paperback edition in November of 2025.

The novel, set in Honolulu, emulates the structure of the *ricercare* by using multiple themes and narrative lines as the protagonist searches for the lost seventh keyboard partita of J.S. Bach. Kirkus Reviews calls it, “A stunning novel, enchantingly peculiar and deeply moving.” <https://www.amazon.com/dp/B0DR3N86XW>

In late March, **Russell Stinson** provided the commentary for a program sponsored by the organ department of Salem College and the University of North Carolina School of the Arts titled “A Bach Recital for Robert Schumann.”

Prof. Paul Westermeyer and **Rev. John Setterlund** announce the publication of their lecture notes: *The Bach Seminars 2018–2024*. A 300-page PDF is available free of charge, by request via email: john.setterlund@gmail.com.



DIRECTIONS TO CONTRIBUTORS

Bach Notes is published twice yearly (fall and spring) and mailed to all members and subscribers. Submissions for the Spring issue are due by 1 March. Submissions should be sent to Rebekah Franklin at bachnotes@americanbachsociety.org.

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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, Music Department, 33 E. College St. Hillsdale, MI, USA, or dstauff@hillsdale.edu.

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