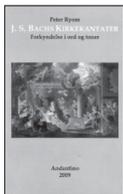


aims in a multifaceted music, many of the examples rather point by their selection and graphical presentation towards the old picture of Josquin as the perfect artist who constructs an ideal world in tones. In his remarks on the ending of *Missa La sol fa re mi* Fallows discusses the to his ears unexpected ending in A of the Phrygian ostinato mass (the 'Agnus Dei' is presented complete in Ex. 40). 'Here is after all one of the most perfect works Josquin ever composed, immaculately logical until this moment.' (p. 185). In spite of his careful and sensible reasoning in the following comments he seems somewhat stuck in the outdated genius worship, which has marred the Josquin research for ages. This impression is strengthened by the musical example, which is entirely without text; it depicts music heard as pure structure and derived of its reason for existence, the words of the liturgy.

It does not take much of a prophet to predict that a spate of scholarly articles will appear in the near future supporting and developing Fallows' views or proving him quite wrong on several issues. The coming years will probably be the most influential in the book's career. Then it is just to be hoped that Fallows will have the stamina to produce a revised version of his big *Josquin* book – preferably as a handy paperback.

Peter Woetmann Christoffersen



Peter Ryom

*J.S. Bachs Kirkekantater. Forkyndelse i ord og toner*

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Igor Stravinsky, a most competent observer, was once asked what he thought was the most important work in music history; he replied, 'the cantatas by Johann Sebastian Bach'. Numerous publications dealing with the works, performance practice, provenance, and new findings are published every year. In 2009 a Danish book came to light: Peter Ryom's *J.S. Bachs Kirkekantater. Forkyndelse i ord og toner* (J.S. Bach's Church Cantatas. Preaching in Words and Music) which for several reasons is a most welcome and admirable study. Considering the vast amount of literature on Bach in German and English, it is noteworthy that the book is a contribution to Bach literature in Danish, which is not an everyday occurrence. In 1950 Kai Flor published his Bach biography, and much later, in 2000, Jens Kjeldsen expanded the list with his *Mellem kosmos og sjæl* (Between Cosmos and Soul). Most commendable are the publications on the Christmas Oratorio and the St John Passion by Peter Thyssen (2004, 2005), and the St Matthew Passion by Sven Rune Havsteen (2005). Peter Ryom's work offers choir conductors profound knowledge of some of the most central and elevated vocal music that was ever written; in addition, the book is most helpful to performers and authors of programme notes to the works.

Glancing through the index of reference literature reveals that the author has based his research on the latest literature and has thus been brought up to date. The most obvious names such as Blankenburg, Dadelsen, Dürr, Geck, Petzoldt, Schulze, and Wolff are present. Only one major work on the Bach cantatas seems to be missing: Martin Petzoldt's extensive commentary, *Bach Kommentar* (3 vols., Schriftenreihe der Internationalen Bachakademie, Stuttgart 2005, 2006, vol. 3 in prep.). Petzoldt, president of the International Bach Society, presents a theological counterpart to the basic musicological research with special focus on contemporary texts used and chosen by Bach. Mention should be made of this study, since

Ryom respectfully does not forget to draw our attention to the theological aspects of the cantatas, the pericopes and their exegesis. A short passage on the ‘Calov Bible Commentary’ (the only extant book from Bach’s library) with Bach’s personal marginal notes might have served to underline the importance of considering text and music on equal terms.

Peter Ryom has divided his study into three main sections: 1. the historical background (with subtitles such as performance practice, aesthetics, and origin and development of the cantata genre; 2. church cantatas, tradition, chronology, and description of the annual cycles; 3. the composer, language, symbolism, word painting, and a section devoted to the Christmas Oratorio. The author concludes with a most useful outline of all the extant Bach cantatas in BWV-order with dating and vocal/instrumental scoring.

The foreword deals briefly with the often obsolete language, which, of course, seems outdated in our modern ears. Such prejudices are not new, beginning with Karl Friederich Zelter’s disparaging judgement on Bach’s sacred texts: ‘The greatest obstacles in our time lie of course in the mad (verruchte) German religious texts with their roots in the serious polemics of the Reformation’ (*Karl Friederich Zelter – Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Briefwechsel, eine Auswahl*, ed. Hans-Günter Ottenberg, Leipzig 1987, p. 322). But careful reflection and analytic investigation will open up to reasonable ways of approaching these texts, although not as superficial memorials of the incipient ‘aesthetics of the genius’ from the beginning of the 19th century. Bach’s model exegesis seems to have been the *Biblische Auslegung* by Johann Olearius (1611–81), which was his methodical tool for his musical works. Contents and language, depending on time and place, of course, have to be taken into consideration, especially in literature that is intended to arouse interest in these masterworks of church music.

Ryom sums up Bach’s biography, his life and work in an admirably short and concise form. Concerning his early years at Lüneburg we no longer have to refer to Georg Böhm only as the ‘organist’; the recent, important tablature finds allow us to see Böhm as a teacher to Bach, the infant prodigy. Although Ryom’s book is not meant to be a biography, one might, nevertheless, wish for a little more detailed and precise description of the years in Leipzig. His title as cantor was only attached to the Thomas School and he was as *Director musices* of Leipzig responsible for the church music, not only (as mentioned) in the two main churches, St Nicolai and St Thomas, but also in St Matthäus (Neue Kirche), and the Peter’s Church. He was under no obligation to direct the music at the university church (Pauliner Kirche) except on special occasions such as ‘der alte Gottesdienst’ (the old service) and solemn obsequies. (To be fair, Ryom deals very briefly with these issues in later chapters.) Most welcome is Ryom’s pointing out that we can no longer rely on Spitta’s dating of the cantatas. Around 1958 (and later in 1976–77) Dürr and von Dadelsen challenged the acknowledged dating of the Leipzig cantatas with their new discoveries based on Bach’s handwriting, the watermarks of his paper, etc. Recently these findings have been confirmed by a quite unexpected discovery: a small collection of text books turned up in a library in St Petersburg. These text books were printed and distributed to the church-goers of St Thomas, so revealing the year of the performance.

Today’s controversial questions on performance practice are concerned with the use of historical instruments versus modern, and the size of the choir, for example. Fortunately Ryom does not confront these issues, represented by some of the most prominent conductors of today but leaves the music in the hands of the responsible interpreter.

Peter Ryom’s chapters on the history of styles, musical aesthetics, and types of movements are highly recommendable. His text does not demand a great amount of background knowledge. In order to obtain an overview of the music when following Ryom’s analyses, a full score would be a great advantage. The text is, nevertheless, richly interspersed with numerous music examples. Bach’s deep personal relationship to the Lutheran chorale is clearly

underlined. Presumably he uses the chorale extensively to ‘promote a feeling of worship’ (p. 42). We might add that Bach presupposed the intimate knowledge of these chorales in the congregation, which in those days was familiar with the church hymns, even to the extent that just by hearing the tune, people in the pews would think of the text. Ryom does not refer to the possibility of the congregation joining in the chorales of the cantatas (and passions). It is not likely that it did! The harmonizations were too intricate, and Bach did not change the small deviations of the melody when reusing cantatas from Weimar in a service in Leipzig.

The obituary of J.S. Bach, written 1754 in Leipzig by C.P.E. Bach and Joh. Fr. Agricola, states clearly that Bach wrote five full annual cycles of cantatas. This has long been subject to discussions in Bach research. Because of Wilhelm Friedemann Bach’s desperate situation forcing him to sell sheet after sheet of his father’s music, we have to allow for a considerable loss of music. In this respect music history has suffered some of its greatest and most painful losses according to Ryom (p. 52). The generally acknowledged number of five cycles is established also by Ryom in chapters on tradition, the question of ‘Incerta’, the relation between sacred and secular cantatas, chronology, and the BWV index; and Ryom goes on to explain the church year revealing his profound knowledge of liturgy. In the section on additions we are told that cantata 194, *Höchsterwünschtes Freudenfest*, was composed for the inauguration of the Hildebrandt organ in Störmthal 1723; one might add that the occasion was also the consecration of the newly restored church.

The following 75 pages describe the characteristics of the cantatas by means of an analysis of chronologically selected works. The liturgy of the Thomas Church is examined (Bach wrote it down in his own hand twice on the cantata covers for BWV 61 and 62): prima pars of the cantata was sung between the Gospel and the Credo; secunda pars (or another cantata) after the sermon according to Ryom. According to Petzoldt, however, this part was sung during Holy Communion. Concerning the alleged 12 choristers, which Bach normally would have at his disposal for the weekly services, Wolff has drawn attention to the fact that also ‘externes’ (students living outside the school) might have been part of the choir. Here much uncertainty is to be taken into consideration. Peter Ryom presumes that the town council’s well-known defiance might have been the reason that Bach stopped his persistent practice of composing cantatas. That is one explanation, but we might also reflect upon the fact that when Bach had completed a musical form using all kinds of variation, he would stop. A similar example is his *Orgelbüchlein*. With five annual cycles he had laid a foundation for his church music and could now devote his time to the post as *Director Musices* of Leipzig being the ‘Kapellmeister’ and ‘Tastenmusiker’, which – so it seems – was his self-identification. Certain movements of this ambitious project, the chorale cantata cycle, also served as a source of inspiration for the *Six Schübler Chorales* (1748/49), but apparently Ryom found it sufficient only to mention the ‘Wachet auf’ organ chorale.

Who were the librettists to the sacred works? Erdmann Neumeister and his personal cantata manifesto receive special attention; also the important Weimar poet, Salomo Franck, is mentioned along with Lehms, Knauer, Ziegler, Picander, and others. Until recently we have been unsure as to who the librettist of cycle II was. ‘Poet unknown’, we were told. Today it seems that Andreas Stübel, Konrektor emeritus of the Thomas School, wrote Bach’s choral texts. He had a profound theological knowledge (although being marked by light non-conformist viewpoints) and a comprehensive poetical experience. He died in January 1725 immediately following the printing of the textbook for the Sundays ‘Septuagesima’ till ‘Annunciation’, which might explain why this cantata cycle ends abruptly with BWV 1 (*Wie schön leuchtet*) – a situation that Bach could not foresee and thus had to terminate his inventive project. The chapters on parody and Bach’s reworking of earlier works is very informative

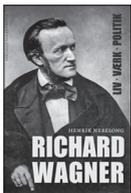
and enlightening; and Ryom reminds us that both church cantatas and secular cantatas can be re-arranged into other church cantatas, but church cantatas never into secular ones. Once sacred, always sacred!

Bach was the undisputed master of word painting and preaching by means of musico-rhetorical figures. A whole chapter is dedicated to this art of baroque expression. Numerous examples describe the foaming waves of the sea, earthquake, floods of tears, knocking at the door, the tick-tock of a clock, diligent paces, laughing and crying. This was Bach's way of creating the 'hermeneutical plus' of the weekly services. If he had written an opera, the music would not have turned out differently. These were his ways of expression that could not be repressed despite the demands of the town council that he should avoid the opera genre. Before his appointment Bach underwent a thorough theological examination that in fact took precedence over his compositional competence; thus Ryom's claim that Bach in his church music deliberately wanted to provoke or offend the signed conditions of the contract may be followed by a question mark. Presumably the churchgoers felt that with Bach a new kind of music had gained a footing in the church, but we have no record that they took offence. At this point it is inevitable to mention the much debated use of gematria. Certainly, many articles on that theme wildly exaggerate, and Ryom advises readers to be very sceptical of such mathematical calculations. On the other hand, it must be kept in mind that number symbolism, although a foreign way of thinking today, was then an accepted mode of thought. There are passages in Bach's musical universe where it seems obvious that he deliberately used number symbolism. But worth noticing is C.P.E. Bach's remark to Forkel in 'Biographische Mitteilungen über Johann Sebastian Bach', Hamburg, 13 January 1775: 'The blissfully deceased was like me and all other real musicians no lover of dry mathematical plays' (my translation).

The author dedicates his final chapter to the highly beloved and 'indispensable' Christmas Oratorio that has its natural place in the exposition of Bach's cantatas. The six secular cantatas re-arranged for this occasion are a perfect example of Bach's reworking and revising of earlier works, thus saving the exuberant music of these cantatas from oblivion. As Ryom states, the first performance of the only competitor to Handel's *Messiah* did not take place until 1857 in Berlin.

Peter Ryom's book on J.S. Bach's cantatas is highly recommended. May this publication be the incentive to the music lover and to the professional musician to enter the world of Bach's cantatas. Here is love for the music, music analysis, and profound theology summed up ... in Danish!

*Knud Svendsen*



Henrik Nebelong  
*Richard Wagner. Liv - verk - politik*  
 København: Forlaget Vandkunsten, 2008  
 520 pp., illus.  
 ISBN 978-87-7695-098-9  
 DKK 399

One cannot any longer expect the general audience to be in possession of what earlier times considered common knowledge about Richard Wagner's oeuvre. The stories his operas tell, the historical context of their composition, and even the history of nineteenth-century Germany and Europe are not necessarily well known today. From this point of view, one can only approve a new book introducing Richard Wagner to the Danish public. From a musicological point of view, however, the publication of Henrik Nebelong's *Richard Wagner: Liv - verk -*