

Danish Yearbook of Musicology

43 • 2019

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*Danish Yearbook of Musicology* · Volume 43 · 2019

Dansk Årbog for Musikforskning

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This volume is published with support from CEMES (Center for Modern European Studies), University of Copenhagen.

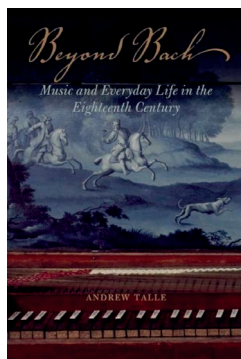
ISBN 978-87-88328-34-9 (volume 43); ISSN 2245-4969 (online edition)

*Danish Yearbook of Musicology* is a peer-reviewed journal published by the Danish Musicological Society on <http://www.dym.dk/>

# The Dialectic of the Clavichord

## Review essay

Henrik Palsmar



Andrew Talle

*Beyond Bach. Music and Everyday Life in the Eighteenth Century*

Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2017

xiv + 343 pp., illus., music exx.

ISBN 978-0-252-08389-1 (pb.), 978-0-252-09934-2 (e-book)

USD 29.95, e-book USD 14.95

This is an inquiry into the role that music played in the lives of some of J. S. Bach's lesser or unknown contemporaries. As a supplement to the traditional portrayal of the great artist, it aims to explore 'the musical lives of ordinary people' around him (p. 2) and to offer 'a sense for his contemporaries as human beings' (p. 9). The author does not state his historical method, but the focus on the lives of common people and the title of the book places it in the tradition of Micro History and the History of Everyday Life. The book provides such a rich and basically different approach to Eighteenth's century music that a planned review turned into a somewhat longer discussion of the social and gender structures delineated in the text.

Andrew Talle investigates the musical experiences of a number of amateur and professional musicians in the context of their wider social world. As the source material on most of these ordinary persons is fragmented, Talle uses his imagination to construct the lives of his protagonists from an exploration of other sources, private letters, diaries, inventories, scientific treatises on many subjects, poems, novels, paintings, and, of course, music, stemming from similar people from the time. The scope is remarkably wide, and the author has an impressive knowledge of his materials.

The book centres on the role of keyboard music, playing, and players, not as high art but as a social practice. Talle explains his choice of the keyboard and its solo repertoire by its central position in Bach's work both as a composer and as a performer, and by its importance and omnipresence in the music culture of the day.

*The dialectics of taming Nature at the keyboard*

The first chapter 'Civilizing Instruments' gives a general characterization of the culture of 'Bachs Germany'. Talle's time scope is a period he calls the galant era. Whereas traditional musicology places the galant style in music from 1720 to 1780, Talle operates with a longer and broader galant era beginning around 1680 and lasting into the middle of the eighteenth century, thus spanning Bach's lifetime. He traces the idea of the galant back to the court of Louis XIV of France where it emerged as a new ideal of social and moral deportment for the nobility. After the economic crises caused by the Thirty Years' War the German bourgeoisie in the last third of the seventeenth century gained a new affluence allowing it to adopt this gentleman ideal. It quickly became a pervasive trend, and the word galant was attached to everything from clothes, accessories, and food (the literary critic Johann Christoph Gottsched famously claimed that he had been presented to a galant Westphalian ham), to the patronage of prostitutes and venereal diseases. The misuse of the word and the fashion it gave name to was criticized and ridiculed by intellectuals like Gottsched throughout the entire era. Talle gives many examples of the galant as an empty, silly, and somehow immoral, luxury fashion that was 'clearly defined by its opposite: the unadorned and functional. ... The patronage of prostitutes was a galanterie because it amounted to the seeking of indulgences beyond the procreative pleasures of the marital bed' (p. 12).

The galant as an ideal of deportment, however, had more serious implications. It was a way for the bourgeoisie to emulate the nobility and distance itself from the lower classes and their physical work. As the German musicologist, Martin Geck, has argued it was part of a larger Western cultural process which had begun in the fourteenth century in which sensual, bodily pleasure was gradually tamed and exchanged for instinctual self-control and order. This called for a still stricter domination of man's own and the outer nature.<sup>1</sup>

Bach's contemporaries could learn self-control and galant comportment from a torrent of handbooks that were published at the time. Talle cites *Die Kunst complaisant und galant zu conversieren, oder in kurtzen sich zu einen Menschen von guter Conduite zu machen* by Friedrich Wilhelm Scharfenberg, 1713. This treatise provides instructions on how to achieve a sort of stoic countenance where all emotions and passions were hidden away, just like the female body was hidden under crinolines and the heads of men under a wig.

The outer surrounding nature was symbolically tamed in the symmetrical patterns of the Baroque garden and practically through still more refined, rational, mechanical technology.

<sup>1</sup> See Martin Geck, *Bach's Inventionen und Sinfonien im galanten Diskurs*, in Martin Geck: *B-A-C-H Essays zu Werk und Wirkung*, Hildesheim 2016, 155.

If the galant in essence was an idea about controlling outer and inner nature, then keyboard instruments were, in Talle's view, the most galant instruments. Whereas on all other instruments the human body is in some way directly involved in the production of notes by blowing, pressing, or striking, the keyboard is an interface between the body and the resonating strings. Especially on the harpsichord and organ, this means that the player cedes direct control over the quality of the notes produced: in contrast to the violin these instruments are not sensitive to the force of the player's touch and therefore not capable of variety of dynamics or intonation, or of vibrato. However, their ability to produce many notes at the same time made them universal instruments on which a single player could reproduce almost the entire gamut of music, making them versatile in almost all musical contexts.

According to Talle, keyboard instruments 'appealed to galant-era customers ... because of their mechanical nature ... Only keyboard instruments enabled players to control sound indirectly ... one could produce a tone with a single finger ... Engineering genius brought keyboard players closest to the galant ideal of physical transcendence: simply thinking of music and hearing it resound in the air' (p. 25). Yet, the attaining of the ideal came at the price of direct control and resulted in a somewhat mechanical musical expression.

The intimate sphere of the bourgeois family was under construction during the galant era. The family produced emotions that called for outlet, and here music, especially when performed on the clavichord, was a popular vehicle. The clavichord is an older and less technically advanced keyboard instrument, but its hammer technique is touch-sensitive and gives the player more influence on the sound production. It can make a crescendo/decrescendo and sustain notes in a singing legato, and it is capable of producing fluctuations in intonation and thereby vibrato. In addition, it is small and was, at that time, relatively cheap. Although it comes without some of the disadvantages of the harpsichord, it has, however, other limitations: its dynamic range is very limited, from *p* to *ppp*, demanding an intimate audience. This means that it was an ideal household instrument but unfit in larger contexts. In some ways, this corresponds well with the galant ideals of control: clavichord playing can hardly excite anybody to tap their toes or any stronger physical reactions.

Talle repeatedly returns to the apparent paradox of the expression of human emotions through inward and outward domination of nature. '...the clavichord both celebrated civilization's triumph and probed its limits ... The instruments ... were engineered for compliance with galant social norms ... the clavichord challenged listeners to express themselves creatively and thereby explore the mysterious power of natural forces that could never be fully subject to human control ... the clavichord offered a fleeting respite from the disorder of the real world. Music brought all ambient sounds into its tow, presenting the sonic equivalent of a forest clearing. By some mysterious means, finite engineering yielded infinite expression. From the hands of a mechanic, inspiration' (p. 42).

Behind Talle's readings of the complexities of emotion, expression, liberation, repression, and technical rationality stands the thought figure of the Dialectic of Enlightenment. Nowhere does he directly refer to Adorno and Horkheimer, but when describing how the galant ideals called for self-control and abstention from any physical reaction when playing or listening to music, he brings up Adorno's famous interpretation of Odysseus as the original bourgeois concert attender from *Dialektik der Aufklärung*<sup>2</sup>: '... Like ... Odysseus, the Galant music lover metaphorically bound himself to the mast in order to experience the sirens' thrilling song without risking physical ruin' (p. 19). He pursues this figure further in the following chapters that dive into the lives of single individuals in bold and productive ways.

One should, however, keep in mind that acknowledging the dialectics of progressing rationality should not mislead us to posit a golden age of expressivity in music which has been lost to technological development. Both the idea of individual emotional expression in Western art music *and* the technological advancements, which at the same time made it possible and to some extent curtailed it, were products of modern rationality and enlightenment. The propagator of galant musical ideals, Johann Mattheson, attested the limitations of keyboard instruments (as cited on p. 26), but he and his contemporaries experienced not so much a loss of habitual expressivity as a need for finding means to realize new emotional ideals in music. And here, as Talle points out, we meet the interesting paradox that the least developed keyboard instrument, the clavichord, proved to be best suited to promote this new development.

### *Disciplining the female keyboardists*

The book is highly gender conscious. It contains chapters on both female and male keyboardists, and in both categories, it has a special focus on keyboard music as a vehicle for emotional and social negotiations between the sexes.

The technique and style of Talle's presentation is taken from journalistic documentary drama, most chapters beginning with a *hic et nunc* such as: 'Sometime in 1750, a fifty-three-year-old tax collector ... approached the door to Braunschweig's Marstall 12' (p. 32), or 'One evening in the spring of 1729, the hands of a sixteen-year-old girl flitted across a harpsichord...' (p. 111). Whether one finds that these actualizations work in bringing one closer to Bach's world, is a matter of temperament.

One chapter explores the life Christiane Bose, a neighbour of Bach, who as daughter to a silver merchant belonged to one of the wealthiest bourgeois families in Leipzig. She was a friend of Anna Magdalena Bach and godmother of Johann Christian Bach and took keyboard lessons with Bach's colleague, the St Thomas organist Johann Gottlieb Görner. As the source material related to her is scant, Talle for the greater part must base

<sup>2</sup> See Max Horkheimer, Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, in Theodor W. Adorno: *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 3, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft 1998, 49ff. and 76ff.

his reconstruction on sources connected to women in parallel situations. From these he then tries to imagine his protagonist Christiane on a day when she took keyboard lessons. The settings are painted with an abundance of evocative details: after getting up and dressing 'she received a chunk of heavy bread – mostly rye or bran with a few stray pieces of straw or hair from the threshing-room floor – which she probably washed down with a shot of brandy' (p. 58).

Talle looks at how girls were brought up in general. It was believed that a girl's goal in life was to become a good mother and wife, and all instruction was directed towards this end. They barely received any tuition in other subjects than household skills, reading, writing, and catechism. The development of their moral character was considered of great importance. Here the acquisition of self-control was, according to the galant ideals, essential. Discipline was hard and often included corporeal chastisement. Talle illustrates how '[m]omentary losses of composure could lead to draconian physical punishments' (p. 48) by way of a long quotation from the author Elisa von der Recke's (1754–1833) recollections of her childhood. She describes how her grandmother gave her and her maid a severe beating with a birch rod because she cried out when the maid accidentally hurt her with a hair pin.

In a later chapter, Talle describes how society installed the ban on premarital sex in women through the fear of physical and indeed capital punishment. Extra-marital sex could lead to unwanted pregnancies, and desperate single mothers were known to have killed their unwanted offspring for which crime they were then executed. 'Detailed reports on public beheadings ... served as cautionary tales for women of all social classes' (p. 70). Talle even indulges in a bit of splatter when based on a contemporary chronicle he relates how the 'neighbors jeered as executioners swung their broadswords and sent shards of bone and sprays of blood into angry crowds' (p. 70).

The education of boys was also often of poor quality, and they too suffered physical abuse ranging from corporeal punishment by parents and school masters to hazing and sexual assault by fellow pupils, as described in the chapter on male amateur keyboardists (pp. 144–46).

Physical abuse takes up a surprising amount of space in Talle's presentation. This is logical, though, when seen in the light of how much store the galant era set by the domination of human nature. It would take many years before the bourgeois society learnt to do without corporeal punishment and achieve its disciplining goals entirely through internalised repression.

Religion furthered this agenda. For her birthday Anna Magdalena Bach once gave Christiane a sizeable book of devotion, the pietist theologian professor Johann Jacob Rambach's *Betrachtungen über das ganze Leiden Christi*, in whose more than 1,200 pages Talle finds the following observation: 'God often spares his children the suffering for which they are destined by granting them an early death, just as God spared Christ the pain of his legs being broken on the cross. Through early death God often brings His Children into safety



and puts them at peace before the floodgates of His justice break open and overwhelm everything, or before the world's evil intentions for the child can be realized' (p. 47). Talle surmises that this would be a passage of special pertinence to Anna Magdalena Bach who experienced the death of more than half of her nine children and to the younger Christiane who only had one child that died in infancy. Religion comforted people but also taught them to accept the world as a valley of tears and not question their role and place in it.

Music and music making could serve as a way for the individuals to escape this threatening world of discipline, violence, and death. But, as Talle demonstrates in most of the chapters, it was not just the emotional refuge and harmless pastime it was made out to be. On the contrary, it was a tool in the hands of (male) society to mould women into their destined roles as homemakers.

Dancing and music making were valued social skills that increased a woman's value on the marriage market. Moreover, a skilful female musician reflected well on her husband and could be regarded as a sign of his importance and wealth, – a household good. Talle cites an account of two brothers visiting the Prussian ambassador in Venice in 1715. After admiring his many paintings, they sat down to listen to his wife performing on the harpsichord as 'a real virtuosa', and they concluded: 'His best, though not his most beautiful piece of furniture was his wife' (p. 57).

Dancing, by nature, involved physical movement and awareness of bodily sensations and thus carried a stigma of possible immorality. It had to be strictly disciplined, and even then, very pious women, who were obliged by convention to take part in dancing, did so 'with tears streaming down their cheeks' (p. 51). Music, on the other hand, was generally considered morally edifying; and especially when performed in the home on a keyboard instrument like the quiet and physically unexciting clavichord, it was viewed as an ideal occupation for a woman. The repertory that women were given to play ordinarily consisted of easily performable stylized dance pieces, minuets, allemandes, courantes, so-called *Galanterien*, which could entertain but not excite players or listeners. Instruments like the flute that called for a more direct bodily involvement were considered unsuitable for women.

Talle quotes a song from the famous collection *Singende Muse an der Pleisse* in which an unmarried woman extolls the joys of being at home with her keyboard (p. 53). For this she will give up all other diversions such as looking in the mirror or playing cards. She would rather stay at home and play than take a walk in the garden. A song like this about the innocent leisure time at the keyboard helped to internalize the ideology that the woman's place is in the home. The thoroughness of Talle's effort to penetrate and present the thoughts and ideas on music of ordinary people is emphasized by the fact that he not only has translated this poem and many others but also has recreated the verses in metrical, rhymed form.

Music did, of course, also give pleasure to performers and listeners and offered an outlet for disciplined emotions. However, the very intimate sound of the clavichord



(which would often be placed in a bedchamber or dressing room) could suggest intimacies of another sort. Talle cites comedies by Marpurg and Picander (librettist of Bach's St Matthew Passion) which poke fun at keyboard teachers making licentious advances to their female pupils whenever the chaperone leaves the room. He also offers an interesting reading of a painting by Johannes Tischbein (famous for his portrayal of Goethe in the Roman Campagna), a self-portrait with his wife seated at a clavichord that clearly illustrates the 'tension between virtue and seduction at the keyboard' (p. 76).<sup>3</sup> For both men and women playing music offered an innocent way to impress members of the other sex. As Talle puts it, 'Music's galant image – its status as an idle pastime completely without practical application – served to both mask and enhance its utility in courtship' (p. 71).

So here again the dialectics played out. The intimate sphere of the modern family created or set free emotion and sentiment. Private music making was one way of channeling these emotions and thus was part of the emancipation of the bourgeois individual and of the bourgeois struggle for social liberation. However, the emotional dynamics in the family also had to be restricted so as to not destroy the social structures they were part of.

Talle relates several stories about hopeful suitors who gave gifts of sheet music to the women they were courting, and he points out how conversation on it and how they played the music served as substitute for the forbidden conversation on their emotions. The free music was instrumentalized and served as a tool in keeping both men and women in their place.

Some women managed to go beyond the social restrictions and engage with serious music and having intellectual careers. One was Louise Kulmus who married the philosopher and literary critic Johann Christoph Gottsched. From childhood she showed great talent for poetry and music, she composed and played both the keyboard and the lute. With her translations of historical and philosophical works, and with her comedies and dramas she was renowned as one of the most learned women in Germany.

For Louise, the marriage to Johann Christoph seems to have been first and foremost a frame where she could realize her intellectual aspirations. He, on the other hand, saw her as someone who could be modelled to fit his ideal of an enlightened woman and could serve as his assistant and by her intellectual and musical capabilities enhance him in the eyes of the world. Apparently, none of them was particularly emotionally attached to one another.

Besides her own literary production, Louise served as a collaborator and as editor of her husband's works. He left it to her to participate in the debate that followed Johann Adolph Scheibe's critique of Bach in the journal *Der Critische Musicus*. This publication was modelled on Gottsched's *Critische Dichtkunst* and presented an aesthetic of music

3 The image may be viewed at [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:1756\\_Tischbein\\_Selbstbildnis\\_mit\\_seiner\\_ersten\\_Frau\\_am\\_Klavichord\\_anagoria.JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:1756_Tischbein_Selbstbildnis_mit_seiner_ersten_Frau_am_Klavichord_anagoria.JPG)

in line with Gottsched's ideas of literature, including the attack on the *Schwülstigkeit* of Bach's music. Louise was critical of Bach both from aesthetic reasons and because she found that the difficulty of performing his music could entail that she was seen as showing off intellectually, something that she did not think was suitable for women. And this is where her life becomes tragic. Even though the marriage to Johann Christoph did not reduce her to the traditional role of a housewife but allowed her to pursue her intellectual interests, she felt that it was wrong for women to directly subvert the traditional gender roles and strive for public recognition. She criticised a female contemporary, Laura Bassi, who obtained a doctorate from the university of Bologna, and she declined membership of the *Deutsche Gesellschaft*: 'I will permit my sex to take a little detour; only where we lose sight of our limitations we ... lose the guiding light of our weak reason...' (p. 119).

Louise was caught in the traditional view of women as the weaker sex that should not strive for full equality with men but remain in the background, even when engaging with art and philosophy on the highest level (most of her literary work was published anonymously).

Later the spouses became estranged, partly as consequence of Johann Christoph falling out of favour with advanced literary and philosophical circles and consoling himself with numerous and scandalous erotic affairs. Louise found it increasingly difficult to share and defend his rationalistic, rule-based poetics (which included condemnation of both Shakespeare and the emerging *Empfindsamer Stil*). She fell ill and explained it as the consequence of too much indoor intellectual labour in her husband's interest (she had no children, partly because she wanted to devote herself to his work) and of misgivings about the rationalistic philosophical project that had been the core of their relationship. She gave up music and died depressed and disappointed at the age of forty-nine.

One cannot help thinking that if she had chosen to defy the gender conventions to a larger degree (as did contemporaries like Dr Bassi, the author Christiane von Ziegler, or the actress and theatre manager Caroline Neuber, with whom both of the Gottscheds collaborated), she might have led a more fulfilled life.

### *Religious aspects of music*

The chapters on male keyboardists have fewer moving stories (although the account of pastor J.C. Müller's musical youth and courtship based on his autobiography certainly is one), but it has many interesting observations on the material conditions of both amateurs and professionals. However, in some instances, there seem to be too many details and speculations.

We read about a bureaucrat from Fulda, Johann Heinrich Fischer, who was a keen music lover and a collector of music prints and books on music theory. It is interesting

to learn about his collection which he made available to others by lending out and later by handing it over to a public library; but it seems unnecessary to know that he died of a catarrhal inflammation in his chest. Likewise, it does not add much to our understanding of Bach's environment that one of Fischer's borrowers, the Benedictine monk, composer, and cathedral organist in Fulda, Fructuosus Röder, suffered from haemorrhoids. Even allowing for the fundamental function of normally disregarded elements of human existence for the History of Everyday Life, this really has no bearing on the matter under discussion. It is just a curious fun fact like many others in the book.

Röder borrowed a print of Bach's keyboards partitas from Fischer, and to Talle it is noteworthy that a monk and a civil servant from a Catholic city could appreciate music by the 'quintessentially Lutheran composer' (p. 168). The idea that Catholic music lovers on religious grounds should have objected to secular keyboard music is, however, somewhat strange, given the enormous contributions to secular instrumental genres by Catholic composers like Corelli, Vivaldi, and Scarlatti.

As Talle points out in his introduction, outside of Saxony Bach was mainly known as a composer of secular keyboard music. One might add that the idea of Bach as first and foremost the Lutheran 'arch cantor' belongs to the nineteenth century after the rediscovery of the St Matthew Passion. Bach was apparently a devout Lutheran, but he probably saw both sacred and secular music as emblems of the order of the divine cosmos in line with the medieval view of music inherited from Antiquity. He was pragmatic in his relationship with the different Christian denominations. He composed most of his instrumental music, the Brandenburg Concertos, *Das Wohltemperierte Clavier*, the chamber music, while in the service of the reformed court in Köthen (where church music was not wanted). The London keyboard suites, in which we detect his reception of Vivaldi's concerto form, were probably composed while he was organist in Lutheran Weimar. And late in life he produced the B Minor Mass as part of his efforts to obtain a position with the Catholic king in Dresden. Bach drew on inspiration from both German, French, and Italian music; especially his instrumental music is cosmopolitan in nature and above nationalities and denominations, and it was, by all appearances, received as such.

Talle's speculations on why an unknown hand later deliberately ripped out most pages from Fischer's print of Bach's partitas – whether out of objection to 'Bach's religious orientation, by the perceived secular nature of the collection or by the musical style' (p. 169) – seem therefore idle.

Generally, Talle's ideas about the functions of religion are somewhat simplistic. In a chapter on the inauguration of a Silbermann organ, he again expounds on the dialectic of the organ as on the one hand being the king of musical instruments, a mythical object ordained by God and made to sing his praise, and on the other hand being 'among the most complicated pieces of technology in existence' (p. 200), a product of rationality.

The organ played a large role as a metaphor in philosophical discussions of the day. When materialist philosophers in the tradition of Spinoza claimed that man was just a ghost in a machine, some of their opponents used the organ's need of an organist as a picture of the body's need of a soul and ultimately of God. Talle offers a lengthy quote from Ludvig Holberg who refuted this as unsound argumentation though without condoning the materialist view (p. 201).

Yet, Talle concedes that ordinary people had 'little interest in this philosophical debate'. Instead, he says, their fragile existence gave them a need for the comfort of religion and therefore they 'devoted their resources to building organs in the hopes of inspiring God's mercy. ... The church organ – the most complex machine in the world, the product of the best and brightest minds – was a prayer machine. Church organists were ... employed to appeal to God on behalf of their congregations' (p. 202).

It is highly unlikely that any individual of Bach's time would have thought of the organ as a 'prayer machine'. Though from some Catholic viewpoints it was meaningful to cultivate God's favour by adorning the church with gold, organs, and music, such a view was in direct violation of Protestant, Lutheran, and Reformed dogma. It is a central contention of all Protestant theology that humans cannot do anything to incur God's mercy. They must pray for it and praise Him; but no act on their side, only the grace of God, can lead to salvation. Many people were undoubtedly steeped in heathen ideas of influencing the deity through material sacrifices, but their preachers in their sermons and the texts of their hymns and church music would constantly pronounce to them the impossibility of justification through merits. The function of the organ was much more complicated than being just a 'prayer machine'. It involved a complicated and contradictory set of religious and social notions among which the wish of the bourgeois class to display its economic and cultural capital played a large part.

### *Bach and the galant*

*Beyond Bach* is not a feel-good book. It portrays a hard and threatening world: 'The relative prosperity of the galant era notwithstanding, the vast majority of Bach's contemporaries remained deeply concerned about survival. Half of all children – the offspring of the peasantry, the bourgeoisie, and nobility alike – died of mysterious ailments during their first few years. Fires, floods, and epidemic diseases decimated entire communities' (p. 201).

The official religion laid the reality of human suffering on the individuals as guilt and as punishment for original sin. And, as Talle demonstrates, the asylum of music making was seized upon by society and made into a tool for upholding a stable social order and keeping especially women in their proper place.

Most of the book deals with the repressive sides of how the German bourgeoisie in its struggle for social liberation strove to amass cultural capital through the galant

culture of intimate household music. It is a fascinating investigation; but in order to offer a fuller understanding of Bach's 'cultural context' and to give more weight to his dialectics Talle might have given more space to the progressive sides of the galant culture.

The galant was more than just ideology, a silly fashion, or a repressive moral code. The title of Johann Mattheson's *Das Neu=Eröffnete Orchestre, oder Universelle und gründliche Anleitung wie ein Galant Homme einen vollkommenen Begriff von der Hoheit und Würde der edlen Music erlangen / seinen Gout darnach formiren / die Terminos technicos verstehen und geschicklich von dieser vortrefflichen Wissenschaftt raisonniren möge* (1713) reads like a manifesto for a progressive attempt of liberating music and musicians. The aim is not only to acquire a modern taste in music but through knowledge to be able to think rationally about it. In his music criticism some thirty years later, Rousseau discarded the medieval metaphysical view of music as a mirror of cosmic order; instead, he claimed music for humanity as a product of human culture and as a means of human emotional expression. Mattheson, without sharing Rousseau's critique of the arts and sciences, was in line with his idea of a break with medieval metaphysics, compositional rules, and traditions. He tried to understand music on a rational, empirical basis. He also shared with Rousseau the galant idea of the supremacy of melody in music. In German bourgeois tradition, however, he still greatly valued good craftsmanship. He did not discard, as his conservative critics would have it, counterpoint and other learned aspects of music, but he insisted that they be put in the service of human expression. To him the true galant was a modern sensibility that included knowledge and understanding of all sides of music.

This was also Bach's position, although many of his contemporaries heard it differently. To Scheibe and others he was a learned dinosaur whose style, in Talle's words, 'was at odds with the prevailing aesthetic of his era which celebrated lightness and ease' (p. 7). Certainly, his music did not fit smoothly into the system of music making of his time. With its radical mixture of construction and expression it could not serve as an easy pastime or a vehicle for marital negotiations, it did not really fit the divine service nor the market, and to an intellectual music lover like Louise Gottsched it was too emphatically artistic.

Yet, Bach's music rises above the dichotomy of *gelehrt/galant*. Martin Geck claims that Bach's *Inventionen und Sinfonias* (BWV 772–801), which are generally seen as first and foremost learned music, are, in fact, emblems of galant composition in that they expressly combine learned construction with the galant ideal of a 'cantabile', singing, expression.<sup>4</sup> And as Bach in these pieces reflected the galant discourse, so his entire oeuvre engaged dialectically on the highest artistic and philosophical level with the aesthetic maxims of his day and with the tension between the medieval theological worldview and modern individual expression.

4 Geck, *Bachs Inventionen und Sinfonien*, 137ff.

Talle's book succeeds in its aim of providing 'a rich cultural context for J. S. Bach's life and music' (p. 9). To this reviewer, though, it has always been difficult to understand how Bach found the artistic freedom to realize his radical oeuvre. After reading Andrew Talle's fascinating account of the constricting social structures of his time and of the frustrated musical lives of some of his contemporaries, it seems an even bigger riddle.

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