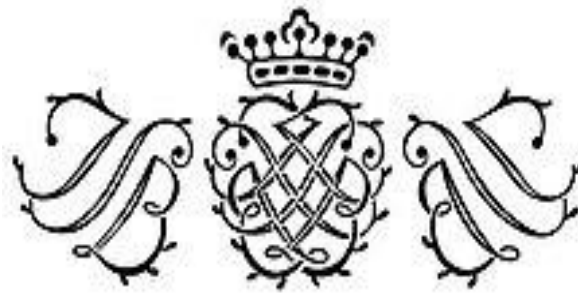


The meanings behind Bach's seal



Bach Seal

It is common knowledge that the “pineapple” in Bach’s seal is the script letters J S B forwards and backwards joined together into one image. But, what about the crown above? I am not aware of anyone who has posited what that is about

I propose a simple analysis based on Bach’s own numerology:

- Five is the number of wounds of Jesus.
- Six is the number for creation (in the Bible the world was created in six days).

Bach himself often marked in his scores that his work was ‘Soli Deo Gloria.’ Clearly, as a deeply religious person, Bach’s spiritual goal was to end up in heaven after dying. With these well-known facts in mind, the crown’s meaning reveals itself. Bach is referring his music making to Jesus – as identified by the five dashes (one for each of Jesus’ wounds on the cross) in the arch immediately above the ‘pineapple.’

Bach associates his crown with creativity by referencing the number six with the six arrows that grow out of the five dashes above the ‘pineapple.’ Thus Bach symbolically asserts that his music comes from or is made possible by God. (That is why he chose six cantata arias to become the six Schübler Chorale Preludes, wrote six Brandenburg Concerti as an audition submission, etc.)

That leaves one arrow in the top, center of the seal.

- One is the number for God. The center “arrow” makes it clear that Bach is aiming his work to an audience of one: God on high.

In that reference to God on high, Bach also acknowledges God as a *triune* being. There are three bulges above that center arrow. In fact the idea of three is reinforced with the half circle on each far side (perhaps the “Son” and the “Holy Spirit” with God the Father being in the middle).

With these thoughts in mind not only do all the marks above the “pineapple” make great sense, but the seal beautifully encapsulates Bach’s world view of music and life.

T. Herbert Dimmock, 2024