

Another Chink in Rifkin's OVPP Theory

How Many Vocalists Sang Telemann's Sacred Music in Hamburg?

How Many Singers Sang from a Single Part?

It appears that another chink has appeared in Joshua Rifkin's OVPP theory, a theory that audaciously asserts that Johann Sebastian Bach's sacred, figural music was sung by only one vocalist per original vocal part; *i.e.*, if there was only one soprano part in Bach's original set of performance parts, then only one soprano would or could sing from it. In a recently published book, Jürgen Neubacher has carefully examined in detail all of Georg Philipp Telemann's extant performance materials (original parts, financial records of performances, etc.) for the sacred music performances during his tenure in Hamburg (1721-1767).¹ While Neubacher's summaries of his compiled evidence reveal many things that might shed some light on Bach's performance practices, it would be dangerous indeed to assume that the situation a city-appointed cantor faced in Hamburg would necessarily be quite comparable to a similar cantorship in Leipzig. Depending upon many factors, including a city's unique vocal tradition embedded in a history of its churches, schools and government, it is possible to note numerous divergences between both cities, divergences that appear at times to be completely irreconcilable. This means that great care must be observed in pointing out apparent analogies and extrapolating from these unwarranted conclusions. Fortunately, Neubacher has provided a wealth of detail for any reader to ponder so that at least a few comparisons can cautiously be advanced. One of these involves Neubacher's observation that Telemann, on occasion for instance, had two sopranos sing from the same physical part, a sheet of music copied from the score and used for performances under his direction.² On this part the copyist had written both *1.^{ter} Cantus* and *2.^{ter} Cantus* (1st Soprano, 2nd Soprano) regarding which Neubacher points out that these indications mark the places where one or the other soprano should sing alone while other unmarked passages or movements were to be sung by both simultaneously. In the latter instances, both sopranos sing from the same physical part.³ Even in such instances where only *concertists* were involved and the physical space on the sheet of paper allowed it, Telemann would have the copyist place both parts on the same, single sheet of paper thus requiring both voices to sing from this same part those passages or movements (mainly opening choral movements and closing chorales) where

¹ Jürgen Neubacher, *Georg Philipp Telemanns Hamburger Kirchenmusik und Ihre Ausführungsbedingungen (1721=1767): Organisationsstrukturen, Musiker, Besetzungspraktiken*, Magdeburger Telemann-Studien XX (Georg Olms Verlag, 2009).

² Neubacher, p. 279.

³ Instances of this type are not to be confused with other *ripieno* parts which Telemann supplied for his vocalists during this period. There are a number of instances with three vocalists, where there are three *concertists* (SSB=Soprano, Soprano, Bass) and three *ripienists* (SSB), each having a separate part from which to sing. In the ledgers the *concertists* are referred to as *Concert-Sänger* and the *ripienists* are called *Ripien-Sänger*, while, on the parts themselves, the vocal parts for the bass voice/part are designated, for instance, as *Basso Conc:[concertato]* for the *concertist* vs. *Ausfüllungs Baß* [filler bass] for the *ripienist*.

both parts were required to sing simultaneously.⁴ Another more striking proof that singers could and did sing from the same part occurs in another cantata where the alto *concertist* is instructed to sing the opening choral movement as well as the final chorale from the soprano *concertist's* part. The soprano's part included the alto's part for both movements on the same staff in what is called *Division*, where both parts are notated an octave apart.⁵ There is also a more unusual case where Telemann instructs the *concertist* on his part to go over and/or look over to the *ripienist's* part and sing from it the final chorale.⁶ In regard to such instances where the financial records indicate the names of two individuals per part, but the original parts have only a single vocal set (one for soprano, one for alto, etc. with no *ripieno* parts, where such parts could possibly be missing), Neubacher considers it reasonable to conclude that that there were two vocalists singing from each extant part.⁷

Neubacher's conclusion based on his careful examination of existing documentation is, when Telemann scored his compositions for *doppelter Vokalbesetzung* ["double vocal scoring" = two vocalists per part, usually implying that one was a *concertist* and the other a *ripienist*], he often had two vocalists singing from one and the same sheet of music. These findings clearly contradict or stand apart from Joshua Rifkin's theory, first formulated in 1981, "that he [=Bach] always meant his voice parts for one singer and one singer only" [for the performance practices Bach used for his sacred music in Leipzig].⁸ Combine Neubacher's observations with Bach's autograph documentation on this matter where he [Bach] twice gives his own definition of *Chor* or *Vocal Chor*,⁹ then it should become evident that two great contemporary composers and performers such as Bach and Telemann, who did have contact with each other, were not bound by the notion that only one singer could or did read the notes intended for one vocal part because only a single copy of that part had been prepared for the performance. Or, to put it another way, when the composer had only a single part prepared for each vocalist, this would not preclude other singers from being able to look at the same part and sing from it the same musical line that had been prescribed by the composer for that specific vocal part.

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⁴ Neubacher refers here specifically to the original set of parts for Telemann's cantata *Wir haben hier keine bleibende Statt* (TVWV 1:1665), later reused as the first part of the *Trauermusik* [Mourning or Funeral Music] (TVWV 4:9). One of the parts is designated as *Discant u. Alt* [for Soprano and Alto] and the passages or movements where both *concertists* are required to sing from the same page are marked *Alle* [all together].

⁵ For an example of this procedure Neubacher points to the cantata *Wünschet Jerusalem Glück* (TVWV 1:1727).

⁶ The reference here is to the cantata *Lobet den Herrn, alle Heiden* (TVWV 1:1059) where Telemann has the copyist write *Choral auf der Ausfüllungs Stimme* [=the chorale is found on the *ripienist's* part].

⁷ Neubacher, p. 279: *Auf doppelte Besetzung der Singstimmen und gemeinsame Benutzung eines Stimmblattes kann auch dann geschlossen werden, wenn zum Zwecke der Zuordnung von Solo-Partien mehrere Sängernamen in einer Stimme genannt werden, wie beispielsweise in den Tenor- und Baßstimmenblättern des Originalstimmensatzes des Oratoriums zur Goldenen Hochzeit des Ehepaars Mutzenbecher* (TVWV 11:15a/b).

⁸ Neubacher refers to the "One-to-a-part" theory proposed by Joshua Rifkin in his *Lecture for the Annual Convention of the American Musicological Society*, (Boston, 1981) also reprinted in Andrew Parrott, *The Essential Bach Choir*, (Woodbridge, 2000).

⁹ see <http://www.bach-cantatas.com/Articles/EintellungChor.pdf> from Bach's *Entwurf* (Leipzig, August 23, 1730) *Zu iedweden musicalischen Chor gehören wenigstens 3 Sopranisten, 3 Altisten, 3 Tenoristen, und eben so viel Baßisten* ["a choir should at least have 3 sopranos, 3 altos, 3 tenors and just as many basses"].