Arnold Schering

on

"Who sang the soprano and alto parts in Bach's cantatas?"

Translation by Thomas Braatz © 2009

[The following is a translation of pages 43 to 48 from Arnold Schering's book, *Johann Sebastian Bachs Leipziger Kirchenmusik*, published in 1936 in Leipzig and presented in facsimile after the translation. To distinguish between Schering's original footnotes and mine, his are highlighted in red while mine are left in black.]

The paragraph leading into this passage describes Georg PhilippTelemann's (1681-1767) sacred music activities in the *Neukirche* (New Church) in Leipzig. These cantata performances were accomplished by Telemann with the help of university students only and without any assistance from the *Thomaner*¹ choir(s) which were under Johann Kuhnau's (1660-1722 - Bach's immediate predecessor) direction. Jealous of the success that Telemann was having with his performances, Kuhnau commented that the young people there [*Neukirche*] had no real idea about what the proper style of singing in a church was all about and that their goal was "directed toward a so-called cantata-like manner of singing". By this he evidently meant the elegant, modern way that male *falsettists*² sang their solos [compared to the soprano and alto voices of young boys before their mutation].

What was Bach's way of treating this matter in his sacred music?

A cantor's constant concern, as we have seen, is the ability to obtain and train good sopranos and basses. Kuhnau's experience, that among his young scholars strong bass singers were a rarity,³ was an experience that his cantor predecessors in Leipzig had already had. For this reason they were forced, again and again, to engage [hire]

¹ German references will be used throughout because these compound nouns are generally shorter than their English forms; for example, *Thomaner* = the boys enrolled at the St. Thomas School who are members of a choir; *Thomasschule* = St. Thomas School; *Thomaskirche* = St. Thomas Church; *Nikolaikirche* = St. Nicholas Church; *Thomaskantor* = the cantor at the St. Thomas School & Church;

² Despite the negative connotation associated with the term *falsettist*, it will be maintained throughout as a translation of the Schering's term *Falsettist* which in short refers to adult males (not to be confused with *castrati*) who can sing in the alto and soprano ranges after they have experienced mutation. At various times and places they have also been known sopranists, altists, countertenors, etc.

³ Philipp Spitta, Johann Sebastian Bach, volume II, 1880, p. 859.

basses who were not *Thomaner*⁴ and who mainly consisted of university students. Beginning with the *Thomaskantor* Sebastian Knüpfer [*Thomaskantor* from 1657 to 1676], the churches⁵ recorded considerable sums⁶ usually amounting to 28 *Florins* and 12 *Groschen* [€ 1800,00] for the services of two singers. In 1708 these payments were not forthcoming so Kuhnau had to request them anew; however, the authorities did not heed his request. In the future neither he nor Bach could depend upon receiving these regular payments for *supernumerari*.⁷ When it became necessary, they [Kuhnau and J. S. Bach] would have to pay these assistants out of their own pockets.⁸ It will remain an open question whether Bach no longer experienced as important the lack of good basses or whether (as in the case of motet performances) the use of continuo accompaniment made up for the lack of strength in the vocal bass line. In any case, only older, more mature singers could possibly sing the great bass arias and the part of Christ.

Even greater difficulties were posed by the sopranos. Their tender young voices suffered terribly from the ordeals (strains) caused by the trying performance schedule they were required to fulfill. Kuhnau had stated⁹ that "the best singers, particularly the sopranos," often could not even be used since they

"as they are constantly required to be present in all singing activities, cannot be spared from singing a lot because they are needed for funerals, weddings, caroling and other processions through the streets, particularly evenings during the time around New Year's which lasts for two to three weeks when the air is raw and there is a biting wind. For these reasons it is more likely that they will lose their voices before they have acquired the necessary vocal skills to be able to sing reliably and with some good judgment any easy figural music that is placed before them or to sing it while observing carefully the proper beat according to the style appropriate for singing in churches." ¹⁰

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⁴ These are the students officially enrolled at the *Thomasschule* either as *interni* (those accepted with a scholarship which covered their studies and room and board) or *externi* (those without scholarships who are allowed to attend classes during the day and who keep applying each year to become *interni*).

⁵ Probably only the *Thomaskirche* and *Nikolaikirche* are referred to here.

⁶ These are entries made in the church ledgers.

⁷ These are the musical assistants, both vocal and instrumental, that are drawn mainly from the available pool of talented university students and do not include the city pipers or violinists (*Musikanten*) that are on the city payroll.

⁸ Only once during the year 1747/48 do the church accounts record an exception: "6 Raichsthalar [6 432,00] for the

⁸ Only once during the year 1747/48 do the church accounts record an exception: "6 *Reichsthaler* [€ 432,00] for the bass, Mr. Johann Christoph Altnikol for his services as assistant for the choirs at both main churches from Michaelmas, 1745 until May 19, 1747." Altnikol [1719-1759] was 28 years old at that time.

⁹ Spitta II, p. 862.

The yearly demands made on the *Thomaner* as far as their energy and voices are concerned become obvious upon examination of the receipts recorded in the church ledgers. For the year 1728/29 the entry reads: "42 *Reichsthaler* [\in 3024,00] for 42 funerals for singing motets before the front doors of the deceased at 1 *Reichsthaler* [\in 72,00] per

Since January, 1681, for this reason, each of the two main churches [Thomaskirche and Nikolaikirche] had set aside as a special remuneration or reward amounting to an annual payment of 2 Florins (€ 126,00), later 1 Reichsthaler 18 Groschen (€ 72,00) "for the best sopranos and altos in the Thomasschule" a so-called Schonungsgeld, a recompense, a monetary compensation given in consideration for the financial loss a *Thomaner* would face by not taking part in the caroling activities and, which served at the same time as a remuneration [here almost used as a bribe] which would keep a singer from exposing himself [his voice] to the elements over an extended period of time mainly in the evening darkness during winter. Thus he would be spared [schonen] so that he could sing properly during church services of which there were more than the usual number during Christmas, New Year's, and Epiphany so that he and other young singers would stay away from the Christmas and New Year's caroling and other events that involved moving about in processions in cold weather. The Kreuzchor of Dresden (the Dresden Boys' Choir) has for a long time had a similar tradition. These account entries [in the church records of the two main churches in Leipzig] recur regularly and almost without change in the following decades with only a few gaps where the information is missing.

This *Schonungsgeld* was at first designated to be used for the best sopranos and altos. Later references describe the recipients of these sums only as sopranos or, more generally, as *Concertisten*. ¹¹ Just how many individuals were involved each time is not indicated; but, based upon the small amount of money involved, ¹² it could not have been more than two, most likely the best sopranos from the primary and secondary

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event." In the following year there were 47 funerals. This type of entry refers only to the grand funeral processions and not to the lesser ones where only chorales and funeral arias were sung. In 1728 (according to Riemer) 1269 people had died in 1729 it was 1194. Even if you assume that out of any of these yearly tabulations two-thirds (children and very poor people) were buried without music, there will still remain about 300 to 400 funerals, an average of about 6 to 8 a week, each of which involved the participation of the *Thomaner* in one way or another. In one official record from Kuhnau's time (1717, *Leipzig City Archive*, VIII, Volume 2d after folio No. 176) it is stated that of the four Christmas caroling groups participating in the preceding year, the first one returned from caroling at 9:30 pm, the second at 10 pm, the third at 10:30 pm and the fourth at 11 pm. The report also indicates that there were many tired and frostbitten *Thomaner* who had to warm up for at least a quarter or a half hour after they had returned home.

¹¹ When Bach was the *Thomaskantor* the entries tended to read as follows: "for the *concertists* to spare them [from caroling] for singing during the church services, as a special treat" or "for the *concertists* to keep them from singing in the New Year's caroling and spare them so that they can sing in the churches".

¹² For more information about the actual amounts that were collected by each choir for the New Year's caroling, amounts that often exceeded 100 *Florins* (€ 6300,00), see *Musikgeschichte Leipzigs*, Leipzig, 1926, vol. II, p. 72.

choirs, whose fresh voices were indispensible for the performances of figural music in the time around New Year's. 13 The number of good, young sopranos with a passable proficiency was, as a rule, so small that it would be quite noticeable if two good soprano voices were missing. At any rate it is striking that altos are never mentioned again even though the devastation caused by caroling in the streets would not have affected their even more sensitive voices less than those of the sopranos.

These guidelines demonstrate anew the moderate [mediocre] level of vocal accomplishment that existed at times. For what good would these two or three 'unused' [those that were still full of energy and in good shape] voices be for a choir that was otherwise completely worn out from their New Year's caroling which often lasted at least two weeks? Despite all these difficulties Bach still had to contend with these conditions when he was composing all of his cantatas from New Year's Day to the First Sunday after Epiphany. It is possible to see that he tried to compose his New Year's cantatas as simply as possible in consideration of the strenuous caroling activities the sopranos were enduring. However, it must not have been possible to remove completely all signs of exhaustion and hoarseness. Was there a means for preventing the worst in such cases, particularly when recitatives and arias were involved?

Let's return to Kuhnau's statements about this matter: 'young people' (here he is referring to the members of a choir like the *Thomaner*) "are better suited for being Capellstimmen¹⁴ than being Concertisten¹⁵ partly because there are always among them those who are just beginning to learn music [and have not had enough training in these matters] and partly because all of them face mutation [change of voice] at some point and some of them even lose their good soprano voices and remain completely silent [without a usable voice] thereafter." So it is like it used to be that the cantor had to concentrate on having several good singers, but particularly on having a very good [strong, loud] bass. Kuhnau indicates in the same source that he not only desires a bass but also stand-ins for both of the young boys who sing the high treble solo parts

¹³ This is referred to by Kuhnau (1717; see Spitta II, p. 863).

14 These are the *ripieni* or 'fill' voices that sing the *tutti* passages in figural music.

These are the section leaders that sing the passages marked *solo* or other solo movements like recitatives and arias.

[die konzertierenden Partien] and still face mutation. Indeed, when Johann Schelle (1648-1701) was the *Thomaskantor* from 1698 until the middle of 1700, besides the two basses [who were being paid by both main churches], there was also a certain university student, Christian Wilhelm Ludwig, listed as an alto and who was being paid 2 *Florins* 18 *Groschen* (€ 128,00) by each church according to their church ledgers. Bach knew about these entries as he even alluded to them in his *Entwurff* which is, in essence, simply a repetition of Kuhnau's demands for financial support for his singers [supernumerari] only this time with a tone of greater desperation. At that time (August, 1730) Bach had jurisdiction over a choir consisting of 54¹⁷ *Thomaner* whose abilities he characterized with this well-known, devastating assessment:

To summarize: there are 17 usable, 20 not yet usable and 17 incompetent [singers].

With the first 17, Bach had to populate both of the first choirs [the primary and secondary] – hence, an extremely incomplete number, i.e., with barely 8 in each choir. The next 20 were still weak motet singers (this was the third choir with many surplus singers who were destined only gradually to move higher) and, finally, he chose a few from the group of incompetents to form the fourth choir.

If we assume now that the performances by the men's voices were generally good, then we would have to seriously doubt whether Bach's demanding soprano and alto parts were sung by boys who ranged in age from 10 to 16 years. Just consider the demands made on a soprano who sings the solo cantata "Jauchzet Gott in allen Landen" (BWV 51), or an alto who sings a solo part in "Geist und Seele wird verwirret" (BWV 35), or in "Freue dich, erlöste Schar" (BWV 30), or in the City Council Inauguration Cantata "Gott, man lobet dich in der Stille" (BWV 120), then the gravest doubts begin to stack up about whether [young] boys, particularly boy altos were really able to cope with these compositions, not only because of their expressive aspects. Their musical expression would most likely have remained steadfastly concentrated on obtaining a clean, beautiful-sounding rendering of the

¹⁶ Bach-Dokumente I, item 22: Kurtzer, iedoch höchstnöthiger Entwurff einer wohlbestallten Kirchen Music....

This is the total of the *alumni* or those officially enrolled as *interni* along with those attending only during the daytime (the *externi*).

music. To be sure, however, there would have been difficulties relating to the physiology of voice production and vocal technique.

Certainly even today [1936] there do appear phenomenal boy singers from time to time, but probably the occurrence of good boy altos was just as seldom as in Bach's time. Simply to wait until such a phenomenal boy with the necessary musical intelligence turned up among the group of young choristers who advanced each year to the highest level in order for Bach to compose specifically for his voice and abilities arias like "Erbarme dich, mein Gott" (BWV 244/39) or "Blute nur, du liebes Herz" (BWV 244/8) was something for which the general practice of a German school choir was not prepared. Throughout his 27 years in Leipzig, Bach also did not compose for such young vocal prodigies, but rather for the normal, new generations of singers who were attracted to come to Leipzig from the surrounding countryside and whom he trained and educated personally with great effort over the course of many years. Compositions like those already indicated that appear in every larger cantata as additional [solo] movements exceed in tone, range, and breathing technique the physiological circumstances of a normal boy's voice, not to mention the fact that such a boy's voice would have had difficulty asserting itself in such an environment as a large, filled church nave against a larger or smaller [instrumental] accompaniment.

Bach must always have had at his disposal a number of adult male sopranos or altos, whom he had trained himself. The only problem we have today [1936] is that we have lost the know-how [and experience] necessary for singing these high, male treble parts so that we can no longer determine without a doubt just where he would have used young boy treble singers or adult males singing soprano or alto parts using falsetto voices. Only through attempting to experiment with this in practice will we be able to come to a qualified decision. In doing so we will always need to consider that the boy sopranos and altos in the choral movements were also supported by falsettists (adult male sopranos and altos) with one falsettist for each part. This becomes apparent upon examination of such difficult solo parts which are written into the regular choral parts and do not appear on a separate part devoted only to the part of the concertist. There are enough instances where the normal distribution: 6 adult male

¹⁸ Most original sets of vocal parts contain only four parts: soprano, alto, tenor and bass.

parts (tenor, bass) over against 6 boys' voices (soprano, alto) would have to be abandoned because three sopranos and three altos would have been too weak compared to the adult male voices. Having one additional adult male for both the soprano and alto parts would have provided for the necessary balance while the loss of either an adult male tenor or bass would have been easier to endure without any obvious lack. The falsettist (who could have been one of the older Thomaner who often remained enrolled at the *Thomasschule* until their early to middle twenties or a university student) looked over the shoulders of the trios or duos [singing from the same, single part] of the smaller boys and sang from the [single] part held by the singer in the middle. Since Bach, in standardizing the number of choir members, does not specifically indicate the soloists who exceed the 12 listed [in the Entwurff and elsewhere], I suspect that these would have come from the supernumerari of the primary and secondary choirs. 19 It may also have happened that one and the same vocalist [adult male] may have sung some parts alternatively in a full, natural voice and with a falsetto voice; i. e., he may, as needed, have sung a solo part in a falsetto voice (adult male treble) but then [in the same composition] have returned to his normal tenor or bass voice. It was not all too rare to have talented vocalists that could sing in all four vocal ranges. Johann Matthias Gesner (1691-1761)²⁰ reports that Bach himself was capable of singing all vocal parts [to help the choir members with their entries during a rehearsal/performance]. A certain Master Vogel, who had applied for a position as teacher at the *Thomasschule* in 1739 lists among his qualifications the fact that in Freiberg he "as a concertist there had sung all the parts [!] in the choir", and Johann Krieger (1652-1735, brother of the even more famous Johann Philipp Krieger {1649-1725}) had composed an aria entitled "Lässet sich ein Virtuoser bey dem Capellmeister hören" ["A Virtuoso Sings for the Capellmeister"] for Weise's (1642-1708) "Politischen Quacksalber". In the latter aria the singer is constantly required to

¹⁹ Kuhnau had stated (1709; Spitta II, p. 857): "So it is that we would especially need such *supernumerarii* right now since the Primary Choir no longer has any university students." The well-known engraving by Crügner used as a frontispiece to the Leipzig Schulordnung (1723) shows the open area between the *Thomasschule* and the *Thomaskirche*. Here the Primary Choir of the *Thomaner* with about 12 to 14 individuals is depicted walking from the school to the *Thomaskirche* in file, two-by-two, with the smallest in front and the tallest last.

²⁰ *Bach-Dokumente II*, item 432.

jump from one vocal range to another thus demonstrating his ability to sing in all of them.

Every cantor would naturally want to have such versatile vocalists. Even Bach would have made use of such talented individuals wherever possible and thus have successfully avoided some embarrassing situations. On a case to case basis he would have decided where a boy soprano *concertist* should be used and where an adult male falsettist (soprano or alto) would be needed. In any case, any musically well-informed listener in one of the main Leipzig churches would have had no reason to be disappointed that he would not get to hear the equivalent to the highly artistic level of performance achieved by the castrati²¹ singing at the Dresden Court Church, since a falsettist's voice often resembled very closely the clear, somewhat brittle sound of the castrato. It is also true that it [the voice of a falsettist] easily blends with the natural treble voices of boys without mixing in any alien or exotic elements. The boys' lack of the ability to modulate their voices sufficiently is compensated for by the adult singers' better breathing technique and greater maturity. Perhaps both Wilhelm Friedemann and Philipp Emanuel, after they had attained the necessary age, were able to support their father for a while with invaluable services as falsettists. It might be worth reflecting upon the following possibility: If Bach's Kyrie and Gloria in B minor had been performed in Dresden in 1733, then we would have been able to document historically, since both would already have been performed as part of the Leipzig liturgy, that these compositions would have been presented using two different types of vocalists: in Dresden the castrati and in Leipzig the falsettists.

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²¹ *Castrato* (plural: *castrati*) = a male singer who has maintained the soprano or alto range of his voice (no mutation) into adulthood because he had been castrated before puberty (usually between the age of six until eight).

"auff eine so genandte Cantaten Art hinaus". Darunter verstand er offenbar den eleganten modernen Sologesang der Fistulanten.

Die hat Bach es bei seiner Kirchenmusik gehalten?

Eine ständige Sorge des Kantors bildete, wie wir sahen, die Er= langung und Ausbildung guter Diskantisten und Bassisten. Die Erfahrung Ruhnaus, daß unter der Schuljugend ftarke Bafftimmen selten sind 1), hatten schon deffen Vorgänger gemacht und beshalb immer wieder auf die Berpflichtung fremder, im wesentlichen studenti= scher Baffanger gedrungen. Seit Knüpfers Kantorat gaben die Kirchen dafür jährlich beträchtliche Posten aus, gewöhnlich 28 fl 12 gr für zwei Sänger. Im Jahre 1708 trat eine Stockung ein, so daß Ruhnau aufs neue darum einkam. Aber die Behörde versagte. Weder er noch Bach haben in Zukunft regelmäßige Abjuvantengelder bezogen, viel= mehr solche Gratiale, wenn sie notwendig wurden, aus eigenen Mitteln bestritten2). Db unter Bach der Mangel starker Bässe nicht mehr so dringend war, oder ob (bei den Motetten) das Aufkommen des Cembalo= akkompagnements ausgleichend wirkte, mag unentschieden bleiben. Kür Bachs große Bagarien und Christusrollen konnten jedenfalls nur ältere, reife Sänger in Frage kommen.

Größere Schwierigkeiten bereiteten die Diskantisten. Ihre zarten jugendlichen Stimmen litten entsetzlich unter den Anstrengungen des zermürbenden Singedienstes. "Die besten Sänger, und sonderlich die Discantisten", sagt Ruhnau³), sind oft nicht zu gebrauchen, da sie "ben ihren vielen Singen, ben Leichen, Hochzeiten, in der Kurrente und andern Umgängen, sonderlich des Abends in der Neu-Jahreszeit ben rauher und scharsser Luft nicht geschonet werden können, woben sie denn die Stimmen eher verliehren, als sie den Habitum erlanget, ein ihnen vorgelegtes leichtes Concertgen secur und mit einigem Iudicio, oder der ben dem Kirchen-Stylo nöthigen Observanz der viel zu schaffen machen den Battuta, zu singen 4)". Seit Januar 1681 hatte daher

¹⁾ Spitta II, S. 859.

²⁾ Nur ein einziges Mal, im Jahre 1747/48, buchen die Kirchenrechnungen ausnahmsweise: "6 rl dem Bassisten H. Joh. Chph. Altnikoln vor die seit Mich. 1745 in denen benden Hauptkirchen dem Choro Musico bis 19. 5. 47 geleistete Assistence." Altnikol stand damals im 28. Lebensjahr.

³⁾ Spitta II, S. 862.

⁴⁾ Was alljährlich allein das Leichensingen an Rraft und Stimme erforderte, geht aus den Einnahmequittungen der Rirchenrechnungsbücher hervor. Zum

jede der beiden Kirchen "für die besten Discantisten und Altisten der Thomas Schul" ein sogenanntes "Schonungsgeld" von jährlich 2 st (später 1 rl 18 gr) ausgesetzt zum Entgelt dafür, daß diese dem Neusjahrsssingen und anderen "Umgängen bei kaltem Wetter" fern blieben. So wurde es seit langem auch im Dresdener Kreuzchore gehalten. Der Posten kehrt in den folgenden Jahrzehnten mit nur geringen, nicht mehr genau kontrollierbaren Lücken unverändert wieder.

Dieses Schonungsgeld galt anfangs für die besten Diskantisten und Altisten. Später ist nur mehr von Diskantisten oder, allgemeiner, von Konzertisten die Rede¹). Wieviel es jedesmal gewesen sind, ersfahren wir nicht; doch mag es sich, nach dem niedrigen Betrag zu schäßen²), um kaum mehr als zwei gehandelt haben, also wohl um den besten Diskantisten der ersten und der zweiten Kantorei, deren Frische bei der Konzertmusik um Neujahr herum unentbehrlich war³). Der Bestand an jungen Sopranisten mit leidlichen prosectus war in der Regel so gering, daß schwerlich mehr als zwei gute Sopranstimmen ausfallen konnten. Immerhin ist auffällig, daß niemals wieder Altisten genannt werden, obwohl bei deren noch viel empfindlicherer Stimme die Verheerungen des Gassensingens nicht geringer gewesen sein mögen.

Jahre 1728/29 heißt es: "42 rl für 42 bei ebensoviel Leichenbestattungen vor den Thüren gesungene Motetten à 1 rl." Im nächsten Jahre waren es 47. Dies bezieht sich jedoch nur auf große Begängnisse, nicht zugleich auf die kleineren, wo nur Choräle und Sterbearien gesungen wurden. Im Jahre 1728 starben in Leipzig (nach Riemer) 1269 Personen, im Jahre 1729 1194. Selbst wenn man annimmt, daß von diesen Gestorbenen zwei Drittel (Kinder, ganz Arme) ohne Musik begraben wurden, so blieben jährlich noch immer etwa 300—400 Leichen — also rund 6—8 die Woche —, bei benen die Schüler in der einen oder anderen Weise mitzuwirken hatten. In einem Aktenstück aus Kuhnaus Zeit (1717; Ratsarchiv VIII, B. 2d, nach fol. 176) wird gesagt, daß von den vier Weihnachtskantoreien im vorigen Jahr die erste erst abends 1/210 Uhr, die zweite um 10, die dritte 1/211, die vierte 11 Uhr zurückgekehrt sei, und zwar lauter "ermüdete und erfrohrene Schüler", die sich nach dem Nachhausekommen "erst 1/4 oder 1/2 Stunde" erzwärmen mußten.

¹⁾ Unter Bach pflegt der Passus zu lauten: "vor die Concertisten zur Kirchensmusic zu schonen, zur Ergötzlichkeit" oder "vor die Concertisten so benm Neujahr Singen zur Kirchen Music geschonet worden".

²⁾ Über die Sohe ber beim Neujahrssingen einkommenden, bei der einzelnen Kantorei oft weit über 100 fl gehenden Beträge siehe MGL. II, S. 72.

³⁾ Darauf deuten Worte Ruhnaus (1717; fiebe Spitta II, S. 863).

Die ganze Maßregel zeigt aufs neue, auf welcher mäßigen höhe die stimmlichen Leistungen sich zu Zeiten bewegt haben müssen. Denn was wollten schließlich, wenn das oft 14 Tage dauernde Neujahrssingen vorbei war, wirklich zwei oder drei unverbrauchte Stimmen innerhalb eines im übrigen völlig erschöpften Chores besagen? Trozdem hat Bach bei allen Kantaten, die von Neujahr bis zum ersten Epiphaniasssonntag einfielen, mit einem solchen rechnen müssen. Man kann zwar bemerken, daß er gerade die Neujahrskantaten mit Kücksicht auf die anstrengenden Umgänge für die Diskantisten möglichst einfach zu sezen suchte. Aber die Zeichen der Ermüdung und Heiserkeit sind wohl nie ganz zu bannen gewesen. Sab es ein Mittel, in solchen Fällen dem Schlimmsten zu steuern? Vor allem, wenn Rezitative und Arien auf dem Spiel standen?

Noch einmal möge Ruhnau sprechen. Die Jugend (d. h. ein Schüler= chor wie der der Thomaner), meint er, schicke sich "theils wegen ihres steten Anfanges in der Music, theils weil sie auch immer die Stimme mutiret, und manche jahre nach dem verlohrnen guten Discant gang stumm bleibet, mehr zu denen Capellstimmen und denen tutti, alf zum concertiren". So solle man benn, wie vormals, "auf einige San= ger, vornehmlich aber auff einen starcken Bassisten denken". Er wünscht also, das geht daraus hervor, nicht nur einen Bassisten, sondern auch Bertreter für die beiden hohen, der Mutation ausgesetzten Knaben= stimmen, und zwar für die konzertierenden Partien. In der Tat war unter Schelles Kantorat, und zwar von 1698 bis Mitte 1700, neben zwei Bassisten ein gewisser L. L. stud. Christian Wilhelm Ludwig als "Altist" beschäftigt gewesen und laut Kirchenrechnungen mit jährlich 2 fl 18 gr aus jeder Kirche besoldet werden. Bach hat von dieser Notiz gewußt. Er spielte im "Entwurff . . . " auf fie an. Diefer "Entwurff . . . " selbst enthält eigentlich zur Hälfte nichts anderes als eine Wiederholung ber Ruhnauschen Forderung nach Sängerunterstützungen, nur verzweifelter im Ion. Damals (August 1730) besaß Bach einen Chor von 54 Alumnen, deren Fähigkeiten er jum Schluß mit den bekannten niederschmetternden Worten kennzeichnet:

Summa: 17 zu gebrauchende, 20 noch nicht zu gebrauchende, und 17 untüchtige.

Mit den ersten 17 mußte Bach die beiden ersten Kantoreien besetzen,
— also in höchstem Maße unvollständig, d. h. mit kaum 8 in jeder

Kantorei. Die nächsten 20 waren noch schwache "Motettensinger" (also dritte Kantorei, folglich mit vielen Überzähligen, die erst allmählich aufrücken sollten), und aus den 17 Untüchtigen schließlich wählte er ein paar für die vierte Kantorei.

Nehmen wir dabei durchschnittlich gute Leistungen der Männersstimmen an, so muß ernstlich daran gezweifelt werden, ob Bachs große, anspruchsvolle Soprans und Altpartien Knaben von 10-16 Jahren zugefallen sind. Denkt man an die Ansprüche, die eine Solokantate wie "Jauchzet Gott in allen Landen" (Nr. 51) an einen Sopran stellt, an das, was in "Geist und Seele wird verwirret" (Nr. 35), in "Freue dich, erlöste Schar" (Nr. 30) oder in der Ratswahlkantate "Gott, man lobet dich in der Stille" (Nr. 120) von einer Altstimme verlangt wird, so türmen sich die schwersten Bedenken, ob wirklich Knaben, insbesondere Knabenalte, diese Stücke bewältigt haben. Nicht wegen des sogenannten Ausdrucks. Dieser mochte, wenn immer, in einem an und für sich sauberen, klangschönen Vortrag beschlossen geblieben sein. Wohl aber der stimmphysiologischen und technischen Schwierigkeiten halber.

Gewiß kommen auch heute unter Knabenstimmen außerordentliche Phänomene vor. Sie sind aber wohl, wiederum vornehmlich im Alt, zu Bachs Tagen ebenso selten gewesen wie jett. Zu warten, bis sich unter dem jährlichen Nachschub ein solches Phänomen mit der erforder= lichen musikalischen Intelligenz einstellte, um ihm dann Arien wie "Erbarme bich, mein Gott" oder "Blute nur, bu liebes Berg" auf den Leib zu schreiben, barauf mar bie Praxis des deutschen Schulchors nicht eingestellt. Auch Bach hat in Leipzig nicht 27 Jahre hindurch für jugendliche Stimmwunder geschrieben, sondern für jenen normalen Sängernachwuchs, der ihm aus den Familien des Landes kam und den er sich mit vieler Mühe im Laufe langer Jahre selbst heranzog. Rompo= sitionen wie die angegebenen, zu denen aber jede größere Kantate Seiten= stücke bringt, übersteigen in Tongebung, im Umfang, in der Atemtechnik die physiologischen Gegebenheiten einer normalen Anabenstimme. Ganz abgesehen davon, daß eine solche sich im Raume eines gefüllten großen Rirchenschiffs und gegenüber einer mehr oder weniger ausgeführten Be= gleitung schwer durchgefest hätte.

Bach muß also immer eine Anzahl männlicher Sopran= und Altsstimmen zur Verfügung gehabt, d. h. sich herangebildet haben. Nur ist heute, da wir jede Erfahrung im Falsettieren eingebüßt haben, aus

der Musik selbst nicht mehr zweifelsfrei zu entnehmen, wo er Knaben=, wo er Falsettstimmen eingesett hat. Nur praktische Versuche könnten zu einer bedingten Entscheidung führen. Dabei ift immer der Kall mit zu bedenken, daß auch im chorischen Teile der Musik Sopran und Alt durch je einen Kalsettisten gestüßt worden sind, was schon daraus hervorgeht, daß derlei schwierige Solostücke nicht besonders ausgeschrieben, sondern mit in die betreffende (einzige) Chorstimme eingetragen sind. Es mochten genug Fälle eintreten, wo die Norm: 6 Männerstimmen (Tenor, Baß) gegen 6 Knabenstimmen (Sopran, Alt) unbedingt verlaffen werden mußte, weil je drei Copran= und Altstimmen gegenüber den Männerstimmen zu schwach ausgefallen wären. Ein hinzukommen= der Kalsettist vermochte den nötigen Ausgleich zu sichern, während ein ausfallender Tenor oder Bag leicht zu entbehren war. Der betreffende Kalsettist (älterer Schüler, Student) blickte dann über die Schultern des kleineren Sängertrios (oder souds) mit in das Notenblatt des mittleren Sängers. Da Bach bei der Normierung der Kantoreibesethun= gen solche die Zwölfzahl übersteigenden Solokräfte nicht besonders an= gibt, vermute ich, daß diese sich unter den "Übergähligen" der erften und zweiten Kantorei befunden haben1). Auch mochte es vorkommen, daß ein und derselbe Sänger abwechselnd mit natürlicher und mit Falsettstimme sang, d. h. im Bedarfsfalle bei einer Solonummer falsettierte und bann wieder zum Tenor ober Bag zurückkehrte. Gelbst Talente, die alle vier Stimmlagen beherrschten, scheinen nicht felten gewesen zu sein. Gesner erzählt, daß Bach felbft vermocht habe, "jenem in hoher, diesem in tiefer, dem dritten in mittlerer Lage" den Ton anzugeben. Ein gewiffer Magister Vogel, der sich 1739 für einen Lehrerposten der Thomasschule gemeldet hatte, gab in seinem Bewerbungsschreiben an, daß er in Freiberg "als Concertista durch alle Stimmen (!) im Chore gesungen", und Johann Krieger (Zittau) schrieb für Beises "Politischen Quacksalber" eine Arie mit der Überschrift "Lässet sich ein Birtuofer ben bem Capellmeifter hören", in der der Sänger beständig in allen Stimmlagen herumzuspringen hat.

Solche Bielseitigen waren natürlich jedem Kantor willkommen. Auch Bach wird sich ihrer, wo es ging, bedient haben und damit mancher

¹⁾ Siehe oben S. 19. Ruhnau fagt einmal (1709; Spitta II, S. 857): "Also wären bergleichen Supernumerarii sonderlich izo, da der Haupt Chorus Musicus von Studenten (!) entblöset ist, gar sehr nöthig."

peinlichen Verlegenheit erfolgreich begegnet sein. Die Entscheidung, wo der Soprankonzertist auftrat und wo ein Sopranfalsettist (baw. Alt= falsettist) einzuspringen hatte, wird von Kall zu Kall getroffen worden sein. Jedenfalls brauchten die musikkundigen hörer der Leipziger Rirchen nicht betrübt zu fein, etwas von jener hoben, virtuofen Ge= sangskunft entbehren zu muffen, die man in Dresden bei den Rirchen= aufführungen der hoffirche aus dem Munde der Raftraten vernahm. Denn das Falfett kam mit seinem klaren, etwas gläsernen Rlange der Kastratenstimme oft sehr nahe. Auch ließ es sich, ohne daß sich Fremdartiges einmischte, leicht mit den natürlichen Knabenstimmen verbinden. Der Mangel an Modulationsfähigkeit wurde durch bas Vorhandensein höherer Atemtechnik und größerer Reife der (erwach= fenen) Sänger ausgeglichen. Auch Umfang und Roloraturgeschick einer Kalsettstimme waren nicht zu verachten. Vielleicht haben Kriedemann und Philipp Emanuel, als sie in die Jahre gekommen waren, dem Bater eine Zeitlang unschätbare Dienste als Falsettisten geleiftet. Folgende Überlegung mag zu denken geben: Wäre Bachs Kprie und Gloria in h-moll 1733 in Dresden aufgeführt worden, so würde, da beide Stude auch in der Leipziger Liturgie verwendet worden find, Die hiftorische Tatsache einer in Diesem Sinne Doppelten Besetzungsart ber Solostude zu verzeichnen gewesen sein: einmal mit Dresbener Kastraten, bas andere Mal mit Leipziger Falsettiften.

The facsimile pages above are taken from Arnold Schering's book:

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