JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH
The Complete Organ Works, Vol. 9
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BACH, BEAUTY AND BELIEF
THE ORGAN WORKS OF J.S. BACH

Introduction – Bach and the Organ
The organ loomed large from early on in Bach’s life. The foundations of his multifaceted career as a professional musician were clearly laid in the careful cultivation of Bach’s prodigious talent as an organist whilst he was still a child. Johann Sebastian Bach was born in Eisenach in 1685, and after the death of his father – the director of municipal music in the town – at the age of ten moved to Ohrdruf, where he was taken in by his eldest brother, Johann Christoph. Christoph was the organist at St Michael’s Ohrdruf and had been taught by Pachelbel.¹ During his years at Ohrdruf, the young Sebastian was a choral scholar and likely had his first experiences in organ building and maintenance.² In 1700 he moved to Lüneburg, as a choral scholar at St Michael’s School; this move brought him into the orbit of many organists, including Georg Böhm and Adam Reinken in Hamburg.³ 1703 found him examining a new organ at the New Church in Arnstadt, where he was appointed as organist in August of that year, remaining for four years, his first major professional organist post (Wolff 2001 p. 526). Clearly showing remarkable talent as a player from an early age, Bach’s career remained founded upon the organ even as he moved around in a variety of posts after leaving Arnstadt in 1707: as the organist of St Blasius’s in Mühlhausen (1707 – 1708), court organist and chamber musician at Weimar (1708 – 1717), capellmeister at Cöthen (1717 – 1723) and cantor at St Thomas’ Church in Leipzig (1723 – 1750).

‘The Complete Organ Works of Bach’
Given that strong foundation, it is no surprise that organ music flowed from Bach’s pen throughout his life. Yet how do Bach’s organ works cohere? For the monolithic notion of ‘The Complete Organ Works of Bach’ is misleading. The picture is more fluid, even unclear, both as to the veracity of individual works and of their particular chronology. The impression is of a combination of works that have reached us in their present form through an often uncertain process of revision and collection (such as the Six Sonatas, BWV 525 – 530) and those with a more definite origin and/or date, such as Clavierübung III, which was published in 1739. Even a collection with a clear didactic purpose that is apparently easy to date like the Orgelbüchlein, BWV 599 – 644 (its title page is dated to 1722 or 1723)⁴ can remain opaque in the chronology and detail of its contents: the title page was added later than the chorales it contains (Williams 2003 p. 227). Many of the preludes and fugues do not exist in autograph form, a fact that in most cases does not affect the question of authorship as much as that of the date of composition, although the authorship of some organ works previously assumed to have been by Bach have been called into question, like the Eight Short Preludes and Fugues, BWV 553 – 560. Others are easier

³ Wolff, Learned Musician, p. 525.
virtue of their singularity either to ascribe authorship to, such as the Passacaglia, BWV 582, or to date, such as the Con certo Transcriptions, BWV 592 – 596, which are from Bach’s Weimar years (Williams 2003 p. 202). However, the fluidity of the corpus is not as interesting – or as significant – as the stylistic and generic variety it exhibits.

Genres, Styles and Influences
Bach’s organ works are characterised, typically for the composer, by a multiplicity of genres and stylistic influences. Broadly they can be categorised into five areas, though inevitably these overlap: chorale-based works (preludes, partitas, variations, trios); the Six Sonatas; preludes/toccatas/fantasias (including the Passacaglia) and fugues (paired together, and single); transcriptions of works by other composers (concertos, trios, etc.); miscellaneous works (Allabreve, Canzona, Pièce D’Orgue, etc.). Williams catalogues the multifarious stylistic influences on Bach’s organ works. Many of these are traceable to other contemporary German organ composers whose compositional style Bach would almost certainly have known. As Williams states, these would have included Pachelbel, Böhm, Buxtehude, Bruhns, Reinken, Kerl and Froberger. Bach’s organ works also frequently betray a French influence, both specifically, such as in the famous example of the Passacaglia, BWV 582, the first half of whose main theme originates in a piece by Raison, and more generically, such as in the C minor Fantasia, BWV 562 with its stylistic debt to French composers such as de Grigny. In addition, an Italian influence is often felt in the manual writing across-the-board from the quasi-string writing in the Six Sonatas to the tripartite Toccata in C, BWV 564 via the Frescobaldian Canzona, BWV 588 and Corellian Allabreve, BWV 589.

Purposes
As the above discussion suggests, it is not surprising that many of the exact original purposes for the organ works remain unknown, though in general terms the following categories of use can be discerned: liturgical (many, if not most, of the chorales and chorale preludes; some of the prelude/toccata and fugue pairs); didactic (the Six Sonatas; the Orgelbüchlein); stylistic assimilation (the concerto transcriptions; some toccatas and fantasias; Legrenzi and Corelli Fugues). In addition, collections such as Clavierübung III and perhaps the Schübler Chorales had a purpose that transcended their immediate utility: the desire to offer a musical-theological compendium (Clavierübung III), or leave a musical legacy (Schübler Chorales).

A Note on Current Bach Scholarship
Such is the scope of Bach’s organ works. But how have they been covered in the literature? There is a fascinating dialectic evident in current Bach studies more broadly between a hermeneutic taken up with purely musical concerns for Bach’s works, and a broader analytical approach to his music that seeks to contextualize Bach’s contrapuntal, figurative and harmonic


6 The work of Peter Williams is helpful in this regard. See Peter Williams, The Organ Music of J.S. Bach, Second Edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Peter Williams, J.S. Bach: A Life in Music (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).
peculiarities and complexities within a much broader framework involving contemporary theology,7 aesthetics,8 philosophy,9 and science.10 Assessing these different approaches to Bach’s music is difficult, as the results are inevitably mixed. On the one hand, there is a need to maintain a degree of musical integrity by allowing the musical features of Bach’s compositions to come first in any attempt to understand them. Thus, some of the least convincing musical-analytical work done from the contextual side arises from an approach to Bach’s music that is too superficial. On the other hand, there is a sense in some of the ‘music-only’ approaches that any recourse to relevant external and contextual questions ought to be dismissed out of hand when clearly such factors occasionally — perhaps often — played a legitimate role in Bach’s compositional process. The ideal, then, seems to be to take an approach to describing Bach’s organ music that both honours the music itself whilst allowing for wider contextual questions to shape one’s thinking as appropriate, perhaps on a piece-by-piece basis. With that in mind, there seem to be two broad extra-musical contexts of particular relevance to the organ music of Bach in which purely musical observations can be worked out. These are theology, and aesthetics.

Theological Aesthetics

Peter Williams highlights a conundrum that needs tackling if one is to think theologically about Bach’s organ music, namely the tension that exists between Bach’s stated theological intention in composition (most famously revealed in the composer’s signature ‘S.D.G.’ — ‘Soli Deo Gloria’ (To God Alone Be Glory) — that has been found on some of Bach’s manuscripts, penned after the final bars) and the apparent self-interestedness of much of Bach’s music.11 The key that unlocks this dilemma is the observation made by John Butt,12 that for Bach, as for other Lutherans, music was intrinsically of eternal value. We can be more specific and outline two ways in which the inherent theological nature of music, as it was understood, appears to have influenced the music Bach actually wrote.

i) Music as Theological Metaphor

A theological idea that was found in the Leipzig circles in which Bach moved in the 1740s was that God’s beauty can be conceived conceptually as a type of *harmonia*:

> God is a harmonic being. All harmony originates from his

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wise order and organization... Where there is no conformity, there is also no order, no beauty, and no perfection. For beauty and perfection consists in the conformity of diversity.13

This fundamental idea of God’s beauty as expressed in His unity-in-diversity immediately invites the metaphorical projection of this concept onto His creation: His beauty is expressed though His creation via the same aesthetic of unity-in-diversity. While criticisms have been levelled at this definition of beauty when held as an absolute value, as an explanation of Bach’s contrapuntal practice it is highly suggestive. This desire for art to imitate nature in its perfection motivated Bach’s musical project throughout his career and is particularly evident in his treatment of counterpoint: ‘[c]haracteristic of Bach’s manner of composing is a way of elaborating the musical ideas so as to penetrate the material deeply and exhaustively.’14 Bach’s maximization of thematic coherence, harmonic richness, and contrapuntal complexity can be thus understood as having a theological rationale. This rationale perhaps best fits the music with which there is no accompanying text to direct one’s interpretation of the musical figures, and is particularly relevant in grasping the aesthetic behind specifically contrapuntal projects like The Art of Fugue.

13 Georg Vensky, 1742. Like Bach, Vensky was a member of Lorenz Christoph Mizler’s Society for Musical Science. Quoted in Wolff, Learned Musician, p. 466.
14 Wolff, Learned Musician, p. 469.
music, this notion is perhaps most useful in approaching the chorale preludes—a genre that covers many of the organ works—where in many cases the background text, where clear, often illuminates both the general affekt of a given prelude, and the specificity of particular harmonies and figurations that have been chosen to illustrate it.

**Conclusion – Bach, Beauty and Belief**

Although the label of ‘The Complete Organ Works of Bach’ for the corpus is a misnomer, there are still many varied ways in which to view it coherently; theological aesthetics is just one example. Theology and aesthetics combine throughout Bach’s organ music, uniting them as works that project a Christian Lutheran worldview through their specifically musical beauty. In this they serve as exemplars of the theology of another towering eighteenth-century Christian intellect, whose published thought also combined beauty and belief with an emphasis on the affections of the believer: the American pastor Jonathan Edwards, with whom Bach has once been compared. Edwards placed the affections-of-the-heart at the centre of his definition of genuine Christian experience, and thus taught that moving them God-ward was the primary aim of any means of grace in the church, whether preaching or music. As examples of Edward’s affection-driven theology in practice, the organ works of Bach clearly cohere in their common ability to promote both belief and beauty, or perhaps more accurately, belief **through** beauty.


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**BWV 531 Prelude and Fugue in C major**

The Prelude of BWV 531 announces its rhetorical argument with a bold pedal solo. The material transfers onto the manuals with broken chord figurations underpinned by scalar figures in the pedal. This Prelude, often noted for a similarity to Böhm’s C major Praeludium and in many ways typical of its North German heritage, is striking for a certain simplicity. Missing is the more daring qualities of chromatic harmony found in later Bach preludes, a fact that reflects the work’s early provenance. This simple clarity—especially evident in the harmonic scheme—gives the movement an elegance, letting the passage work of the manuals develop toward a thrilling close. The Fugue opens with a subject that maintains the arpeggiation of the Prelude’s figures, though given a more melodic turn. The Fugue is marked by extensive episodes of manual-only writing, the brevity of the subject reflected in the smaller role played by the pedals throughout. A long dominant pedal (G) brings an interruption, after which a written-out trill leads to the final cadence.

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**BWV 730 Liebster Jesu, wir sind hier**

BWV 730 is a harmonized version of the chorale tune, in five parts. Its texture and working are stylistically reminiscent of the Orgelbüchlein chorales. Embellishment is kept to a minimum; there is none at all for the first half of the chorale, but some included in the second half. The skill of the setting lies in its harmony and rhythm, the phrases dovetailed neatly with overlapping suspensions prepared by an off-beat pedal rhythm,
producing an affect of yearning. The second half also features an elegant walking bass, giving momentum. To some this has also suggested the lines of the text ‘von der Erden ganz zu dir’ (‘from the earth wholly towards you’).

**BWV 720 Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott (a3)**
This short chorale prelude on Luther’s paraphrase of Psalm 46 is densely packed. Williams describes it as a catalogue of various chorale prelude genres, including dialogue, two-part imitation above basso continuo and bicinium, in which the chorale melody is accompanied by a lively bass and broken chord figurations. The chorale melody is split between parts through the setting in the context of lively imitative counterpoint, which is contains a ‘tapestry of paraphrases’ of the chorale melody (Williams 2003 p. 460). There is some debate about the provenance of this setting. It is possibly linked to the opening of a rebuilt organ at the Divi-Blasii Church in Mülhausen in 1709, but others argue for an earlier date. Whatever the accuracy, the setting contains ample opportunity for organ effects with dialogue, trio, and quartet textures found throughout.

**BWV 768 Sei gegrüßet, Jesu gütig**
The chorale partita Sei gegrüßet, Jesu gütig opens with a straightforward setting of the Chorale in four parts, with exquisite part-writing and an elegance created by the almost constantly running quaver pulse. The cadences are brought out of the texture with semiquaver figurations, and the overall affect is one of gravitas. Partita I is written as a bicinium: the left hand has a melodic and harmonically suggestive bass line, really a cello line; the right hand has a richly ornamented version of the chorale melody. Again a metrical feature that intensifies the musical conversation is the constant division of the main beat, in this case with runs of demisemiquavers in the right hand. Variations I - VI form a natural unit, exploring textures on manuals only. Within this, two-, three-, and four-part textures are explored. Partita II is a variation on the original four-part harmonization of the chorale, with the melody at the top of the texture, but with decoration and elaboration in the form of semiquaver figurations and passing notes. Partitas II - VI are also united by the presence of a single motif that...
dominates each particular variation. **Partita III** is an energetic two-part texture, with the notes of the chorale incorporated into a constantly running semiquaver line. The left hand supports with a walking bass of quavers, at half the speed. In **Partita IV** the chorale is decorated with alternately ascending and descending scales, combined with a short three-note motive, heard throughout. The most striking feature of **Partita V** is the left hand, which plays a repeating rhythmic pattern of demisemiquavers and semiquavers, animating a two-part right hand, with the chorale on top and a quaver inner part. Again, Bach maintains the four-part choral texture inherent in the original chorale, but transforms it in line with the keyboard idiom. **Partita VI** is a rhythmic variation, with the original 4/4 time now transformed to 12/8, with a triplet feel to the division of the main pulse. Again, the four-part texture is maintained, and a single motive dominates. In **Partita VII** the texture moves from four-part manuals to a trio texture, the chorale now in slow notes in the pedals, accompanied by two voices that play off one another. Listen for the final bars, where the two manuals join together. **Partita VIII** features running semiquavers throughout in a compound time, the chorale melody reaching its most florid elaboration. The bass-line preserves the original harmony. **Partita IX** is another trio, with the pedal taking the chorale, and the left hand acting as a bass-line. Again, the manuals are in tandem, musically engaging with each other, and joining forces at the close over the final pedal G. This is the first variation in triple time (3/4). Emotionally, **Partita X** is the heart of the whole work, standing out from the other variations in its length and scope. Generically, it mixes together a solo chorale prelude and a ritornello form. The phrases of the chorale are always played twice, firstly with an ornamented version of the chorale, and secondly as a plain cantus firmus. This is developed with the addition of a second cantus chorale voice that joins for the final two phrases of the chorale. The emotional centre of the movement comes in the final phrase, on the final few notes of the chorale, as the cantus opens out into a glorious sequence, with the pedal in running quavers. **Partita XI** is a return to the original harmonization that opened the work, though now in five-voices. The affect of gravitas is doubled, literally: where the opening chorale added constant quavers to the background of the chorale, this has semiquavers.

**BWV 537 Fantasia and Fugue**
The **Fantasia** BWV 537 in C minor is given highly-wrought counterpoint in five-parts that spins itself from a simple opening above a long-held pedal. The melancholy affect is suggested throughout by suspensions, anguished leaps of the minor sixth, and musical sigh figures. Its emotional potency was noticed by Edward Elgar, who orchestrated both Fantasia and Fugue in 1921–22. The Fantasia is in two sections, each culminating in a climax, and ends with a ‘half-close’ cadence, itself unique in Bach’s Preludes. A simple transition leads to the **Fugue**, in fact a double fugue (with two contrasting subjects) in four parts. The first subject is strident, rhythmically varied, keeping within the notes of the key; the second is smoother, chromatic, and given in even notes. This leads to a sort of ABA structure: the two subjects
don’t come together, so when the first subject returns at the ends there is a real sense of ‘arrival’. The final cadence plays out over a long held pedal G bringing the fugue to an exciting close. Williams points out that the manuscripts for BWV 537 were copied by J.T. and J.L. Krebs, and anecdotal evidence that the MS was almost used as waste paper! (Williams, 2003, p. 60).

**BWV 702 Das Jesulein soll doch mein Trost (Fughetta; Kirnb. coll. No. 13)**

BWV 702 is written as a four-part fughetta, with the chorale melody incorporated into the counterpoint. The subject of the fughetta is drawn from the first two lines of the chorale melody. The Prelude moves from quavers to semiquavers, and harmonically from pure diatonicism to more chromatic writing later. The end is striking, with an unusually high cadence in the upper register of the right hand; this has sometimes cast doubt on its authenticity (see Williams 2003 p. 441).

**BWV 765 Wir glauben all an einen Gott**

BWV 765 is a four-part setting of the chorale melody associated with Luther’s setting of the Nicene creed. The affect is stern, the Prelude written in the stile antico, in a slow duple time, which allows the chorale to unfold slowly. This gives a sense of the stability that is suggestive of the text. The setting exegetes only four lines of the chorale, perhaps owing to the repetition in the melody and unlike BWV 702 the counterpoint is varied enough to suggest authenticity.

**BWV 585 Trio after Fasch: Adagio – Allegro**

This Trio in two movements is an arrangement of a sonata in C minor for two violins and continuo that is attributed to J.F. Fasch (1688-1758), who was a competitor along with Bach for the Leipzig cantorate in 1722. The first movement has a melancholy affect, though with an elegance arsing from its neo-galant style. The prominent dotted motif is passed between the hands in the manner of a question-and-answer, and the Adagio contains Bachian sequences. The second movement features a long ritornello - like a concerto - and is motivically rich with attractive sequences.

**BWV 586 Trio after Telemann**

It has been suggested, though not proved, that BWV 586 was based on a piece by Telemann. It certainly has Telemann’s quirky intervals, and some note the similarities in style with Telemann’s Musique de Table (1733), as well as thematic similarities with an aria in Telemann’s Kleine Kammermusik (1716). The Trio is a lively Allegro, with syncopations bringing life to the music.

**BWV 543 Prelude and Fugue**

The Prelude in A minor, BWV 543, begins with a free, chromatic fantasia in the manuals in the manner of a classic North German fantasia with broken chords and runs over pedals points. There are pedal solos and sequences driven by repetitive motifs. The Prelude is distinguished by its marked affect - anguish. The Fugue opens with a long, diatonic subject which is highly melodic and sequential, giving ingredients for one of Bach’s
most mellifluous fugues, full of sequences and counterpoint that is beautifully inverted. The Fugue shares with the Prelude a tendency for the musical arguments to unfold slowly, with the harmonic rhythm kept slow - the balance between the high level of surface detail and the slow nature of the underlying harmony is one of the chief sources of the Fugue’s dignified feel.

George Parsons, 2018

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THE ORGAN OF TRINITY COLLEGE CHAPEL

The organ of Trinity College Chapel was built by the Swiss firm Metzler Söhne in 1976. The design, by Bernhardt Edskes, incorporated the surviving pipework of the two organs built for Trinity by “Father” Bernard Smith in 1694 and 1708. The organ has three manuals and forty-two ranks, of which seven are original. The 8’ Principal on the Rückpositiv is from Smith’s 1694 organ, while the 16’ Principal on the Pedal and the 16’ Principal, 8’ and 4’ Octave, 2’ Quinte, and 2’ Superoctave on the Great are from 1708. The Victorian enlargements to both the instrument and its cases have been removed, and all the pipework is contained within the restored Smith cases, whose carving recalls the school of Grinling Gibbons. The cases are likely to have been designed by Smith and executed by him or one of his team. The salient characteristics of this mechanical-action organ are the meticulous craftsmanship and artistic integrity employed by Metzlers, the durability of the instrument, together with its rich but gentle resonance, its aptness for the acoustics of the Chapel, and its exquisite balance. It is understandably regarded as one of the finest instruments in the United Kingdom.

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Rückpositiv/Hauptwerk 46 Schwellwerk/Hauptwerk

45 Rückpositiv/Pedal, 47 Hauptwerk/Pedal, 48 Rückpositiv/Pedal, 49 Schwellwerk/Pedal (● Father Smith ranks)
DAVID GOODE

David Goode is Organist at Eton College, combining this post with a flourishing performing career.

A music scholar at Eton, and then organ scholar at King’s College, Cambridge, he studied organ with David Sanger and in Amsterdam with Jacques van Oortmerssen. From 1996-2001 he was Sub-Organist at Christ Church, Oxford; following prizes at the 1997 St. Alban’s Competition, and the 1998 Calgary Competition, he concentrated on a freelance career between 2001 and 2003. In 2003 he moved for 2 years to Los Angeles as Organist-in-Residence at First Congregational Church, home to the world’s largest church organ.

In 1999 he made the first of numerous appearances at the Proms, and in 2002 he made his recital debuts at the RFH and at Symphony Hall, Birmingham, subsequently playing all over Europe, the US, Australia and the Far East. He plays at the AGO National Convention in June 2016. He also has an established partnership with the trumpeter Alison Balsom: in March 2014 they played for the reopening concert of the RFH organ.

Of his Bach CD for Signum in 2013 The Times said: ‘One of Britain’s finest organists puts the 1714 organ in Freiberg Cathedral through its paces …. An exemplary introduction’. 7 CDs of a complete survey of Reger’s organ music have now also appeared, to warm reviews. He has forged a strong relationship over the years on Radio 3 with the BBC National Orchestra of Wales and the BBC Singers, and has played numerous contemporary works, including Francis Pott’s Christus (‘a stupendous achievement’ The Times), and Peter Maxwell Davies’ Solstice of Light.

He has also developed a profile as a composer: a set of anthems has been published, together with recordings by the choir of King’s College, Cambridge, and his Blitz Requiem was performed in September 2013 by the Bach Choir at St Paul’s Cathedral, and broadcast on Classic FM. He played at the AGO Convention in June 2016, and was a juror at the 2017 St. Alban’s International Competition.
Recorded in the Chapel of Trinity College, Cambridge, on 4th-5th January 2016 & 17th-18th August 2016, by kind permission of the Master and Fellows of Trinity College, with generous assistance from the Chapel and Music Departments.

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