

XIX. THE HARPSICHORD

This chapter examines to what extent the harpsichord played a role in Bach's church music in Leipzig. Reports from all over Germany about the use of the harpsichord in church music seem to justify an investigation. Following an explanation of the usefulness of using a harpsichord, an overview is given of the current state of knowledge concerning German harpsichords used in Bach's time. The second section discusses information about the harpsichords in the two main churches in Leipzig and Bach's written parts and scores. As the question of the use of the harpsichord has given rise to a fierce debate among musicologists, an overview is given of the arguments used in that discussion. The last section is devoted to the harpsichordists who played the accompaniment and to what extent Bach used the harpsichord. Finally, the harpsichord as a solo instrument will be discussed. How the general bass parts were realized is discussed in chapter XX (*The general bass*).



Fig. 1. *Lady at the harpsichord by the window.* Anonymous German, 18th century

1. What is known about harpsichords in German 18th century churches?

Reports on the harpsichord in German churches and church music

The organ is generally regarded as the most important, sometimes even the only, continuo instrument playing chords in German 18th century church music. But already in the early 17th century, Michael Praetorius mentioned the harpsichord as an alternative instrument to the organ.¹ Also in the 18th century, the harpsichord was apparently used in church alongside the organ. Accounts from 1711 confirm the participation of a harpsichordist in a Passion performance in Gdansk;² in addition, harpsichord and organ parts of church music by various composers, including Johann Theodor Roemhildt, have been preserved.³ It is remarkable that in 1735 Roemhildt used the harpsichord in various ways. For a number of cantatas, a fully figured harpsichord part was made, whereas there is no organ part; obviously, the organ was not used. In other cantatas there is no harpsichord part and apparently only the organ accompanied. Double accompaniment (organ and harpsichord simultaneously) is also common in Roemhildt's cantatas, but the harpsichord part often differs from the organ part. Sometimes the harpsichord part lacks figures. Also, the harpsichordist sometimes played on where the organ was silent. In the harpsichord parts there are also rules for dynamics (*f* and *p*), which may indicate that the harpsichord had two manuals. For music by Gottfried Heinrich Stölzel, surviving harpsichord parts are found in Gotha and Sondershausen, together with organ parts.⁴ Sondershausen repair bills suggest that there were even two harpsichords in the court chapel, whereas in Gotha a two-manual harpsichord was used from 1713 onwards. Harpsichords in church music - in addition to the organ - were mentioned and praised by Johann Mattheson, Georg Philipp Telemann and Stölzel.⁵ On 3rd October 1724 Gottlob Christian Springsfeldt had to conduct in Weißenfels as part of a job application.⁵ Afterwards he complained that

[...] The accompanying fundamental instrument, which is otherwise placed apart from the organ, because there the beat cannot be seen and observed, [and is placed] with the singers or musicians, [...] has been taken away from me and placed on the organ [platform].

([...] *das accompagnirende fundamental Instrument, so sonst außer der Orgel, weil daher der Tact nicht kann gesehen und observiret werden, den Sängern oder Musicirenden beygestellt wird, [...] von mir weg, und auff die Orgel gestellet worden.*)

¹ Michael Praetorius, *Syntagma Musicum III*, Wolfenbüttel 1619, p. 117 .

² Christian Ahrens, "'... Der Ton ist so prompt und stark, daß er sich zum Accompagnement ganz vorzüglich qualificirt' - Zur Existenz spezieller Cembali für das Generalbaßspiel", in *Con Cembalo e l'organo, Symposium Tage Alter Musik in Herne 2004*, editor Christian Ahrens, München 2008, p. 119.

³ Klaus Langrock, "Die Continuo-Gruppe - Funktion oder Klangfarbe?", in Ahrens 2008, p. 156-160.

⁴ Ahrens 2008, p. 119-121.

⁵ Laurence Dreyfus, *Bach's Continuo Group*, Cambridge (USA) 1987, p. 24f.; Joshua Rifkin, "Ein Dokument zum Doppelaccompaniment im 18. Jahrhundert?", *BJ* 75, 1989, p. 227f.; Hans-Joachim Schulze, "Wunschdenken und Wirklichkeit. Nochmals zur Frage des Doppelaccompaniments in Kirchenmusikaufführungen der Bach-Zeit", *BJ* 75, 1989, p. 231f.; Reinmar Emans, "Continuo-Besetzung bei J.S. Bach - Im Spannungsverhältnis zwischen Wissenschaft und Praxis", in Ahrens 2008, p. 144.

According to Johann Gottfried Walther, an 'accompanying' (*accompagnirendes*) instrument was a continuo instrument on which chords could be played like on an organ or a harpsichord: a general-bass instrument. ⁶ Springsfeldt apparently meant a harpsichord, which was located on the organ platform in Weißenfels instead of among the other performers, where a more direct contact would have been possible. That this was common practice is shown by the word 'otherwise' (*sonst*).

In 1726, *Music Director* Johann Samuel Beyer requested - and received - a harpsichord for oratorio performances in Freiberg Cathedral. ⁷ He wanted

a separate accompaniment with a harpsichord [...], as was customary in Leipzig and other distinguished places, was also considered most necessary for Passion, Easter and most other types of solemn music.

(ein apartes Accompagnement mit einem Clavicimbel [...] wie es in Leipzig und anderen vornehmen Orten gebräuchlich sei, auch für Passions-, Auferstehungs- und die meisten solennen Musiken für höchst nötig hielt.)

It appears that the harpsichord played an important role in 'distinguished' places in Germany, such as Leipzig, and it was even customary. This is also evident from the fact that after Bach's death in 1756, Thomas Cantor Johann Friedrich Doles had a new harpsichord bought for the *Thomaskirche*, ⁸ arguing: ⁹

Because a good harpsichord as well as the other instruments are of the utmost importance as a support in the church.

(Weil ein gutes Clavecin zur Unterstützung sowohl als der übrigen Instrumente in der Kirche höchstnötig ist.)

Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, who learned the trade from father Bach in Leipzig, wrote that he found the harpsichord in church music indispensable alongside the organ, especially in arias and recitatives, if the word 'thereby' (*dabey*) is to be understood in this way. ^B Johann Samuel Petri also discussed the role of the harpsichord in church in 1767 and 1782. ^C So the use of a harpsichord was by no means unusual in German church music.

The function of the harpsichord in German church music

For a number of church musicians in Bach's day, such as Mattheson, Stölzel and Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, the harpsichord was indispensable. They must have had a good reason for this. Of course, there is a big difference in sound between the organ and the harpsichord, although both are general-bass instruments. Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach is clear about the role of the organ: it provides the harmonic 'bonding' (*Bindung*), the 'splendour' (*Pracht*) and the 'order' (*Ordnung*), especially for ensembles comprising many musicians. ^B At the same time, the (large) organ had three disadvantages:

1. the keyboard was usually at a distance from the other performers;

⁶ Johann Gottfried Walther, *Musicalisches Lexicon*, Leipzig 1732, p. 7 ("Accompagnare").

⁷ Dreyfus 1987, p. 227.

⁸ Hans-Joachim Schulze, "Bach Stilgerecht aufführen - Wunschbild und Wirklichkeit, 1984-1991", *Bach und die Nachwelt IV*, hrsg. v. Joachim Lüdtke, Laaber 2005, p. 205.

⁹ Helmut Banning, *Johann Friedrich Doles, Leben und Werke*, Borna-Leipzig 1939, p. 56f.

2. the organist sat with his back to the performers and
3. the instrument, with its mild attack, was less suitable to keep the instrumentalists together rhythmically.

For these three reasons it was unsuitable as an instrument for conducting. This is also evident from a remark by Carl Gotthelf Gerlach, organist of the *Neue Kirche* in Leipzig, who had to play the organ himself during the *Music* in 1744 because there was not enough money for a violonist and an organist: ¹⁰

[...] and I myself have been forced at various times to play the organ without being able to conduct the music.

([...] und ich selbst zu unterschiedenen mahlen genöthiget worden, die Orgel zu spielen, ohne die Music dirigiren zu können.)

In contrast to the organ, the harpsichord could occupy a central position among the musicians; from the harpsichord the conductor had a good view of the other instrumentalists. The harpsichord had another important advantage: with its sharp attack, it could provide rhythmic precision among the musicians and thus keep them playing to the beat. ¹¹ Harpsichord accompaniment was also an excellent tool if the *Kapellmeister* wanted a sudden change of tempo or affect during an aria or recitative. For this reason, it was customary in Germany for a *Kapellmeister* to lead his musicians from the harpsichord (Chapter VII, *Bach as conductor*). Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach wrote that father Bach could keep his orchestra 'better in line' with the violin than with the harpsichord. ^D This wording shows that conducting from the harpsichord was the standard. Mattheson also recommended this method for church music. ^E In order to achieve the goals mentioned, the harpsichord had to be clearly audible for the musicians.

In addition, the harpsichord also had an aesthetic and harmonic function: According to Mattheson, its 'whispering and lispings harmony' (*säuselnde und lispelnde Harmonie*) had a beautiful effect 'on the choir' (*auff dem Chor*; = in the room where the musicians were). ^F Christian Carl Rolle stated in 1784 that although the harpsichord was highly recommended, it contributed little to the sound down in the church. ^G However, earlier writers such as Mattheson and Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach assured their readers that the harpsichord could be heard very well, even in a full church. ^H A loud tone on the harpsichord was even appreciated in chamber music settings, as the following advertisement (Leipzig 1762) shows: ¹²

A large extra-beautiful harpsichord (*Clavier*) by the old Hildebrandt, ranging from Contra F. to E., and because of its strength it can be used with several instruments and full chamber music.

([...] Ein großes extra-schönes Clavier vom alten Hildebrandt, so von Contra F. bis E. gehet, und wegen seiner Stärke zu mehrern Instrumenten und vollständiger Cammer-Music zu gebrauchen [...])

¹⁰ Arnold Schering, *Johann Sebastian Bach's Leipziger Kirchenmusik*, Leipzig 1936, p. 72.

¹¹ Dreyfus 1987, p. 12.

¹² Ahrens 2008, p. 125.

It is obvious that Bach would not have assigned the solo part in movement 19 (*Betrachte meine Seel*) of the last version of his *Johannes-Passion* BWV 245.5 (1749) to the harpsichord, if it had been inaudible to the audience.

Harpsichords in Germany at the time of Bach

The information above shows that the harpsichord could play an important role in church music, also in Leipzig. It is therefore worth investigating what kind of harpsichords were used in central Germany in the 18th century and whether they had a loud and penetrating tone.

In the 17th and 18th centuries harpsichords in Germany were sometimes imported (mainly from Italy and Flanders, later also from France), but were also often made locally.¹³ Few German instruments from this period have survived: from the first half of the 17th century not even a handful, and from the second half even less. More instruments have survived from the 18th century. From the few surviving instruments it is clear that the German builders had tried to achieve a great difference in sound character between the different stops by placing the plucking points of the stops far apart. In the course of time harpsichords became larger: originally they had one manual, one or two stops (two times 8' or 8' and 4') and a range of ca. four octaves, later larger instruments were built with two manuals, usually three stops (8' and 4' on one manual, 8' on the other) and a range of four and a half to five octaves. Most of the harpsichords in Bach's environment in the late 17th and 18th centuries were of this size. According to Georg Falck, who wrote specifically about church music in 1688, a harpsichord usually had three stops.¹ The harpsichords in the two main churches in Leipzig date from this period.

Although there were no major centres of harpsichord building in Germany in the 17th and 18th centuries, many harpsichords were built, scattered over many places. There was much experimentation, resulting in the lack of a uniform national style; the instruments could have Flemish, Italian and French characteristics in addition to German ones.¹⁴ From descriptions and surviving instruments, John Koster and Edward Kottick deduced some possible common characteristics. The bridges would often have been very high, the strings mostly made of brass and the plectra of bird feathers. Middle-German instruments, which were probably also present in Leipzig, were not painted. The thin-walled cabinets were often made of veneered wood (*Fig. 2*), which made the construction rather light. In contrast to the Ruckers tradition, the soundboard had many ribs placed transversely to the bridges, which contributed to the firmness of the soundboard but shortened the sound.¹⁵

¹³ Information in this section, unless otherwise stated, is taken from George B. Stauffer, 'J.S. Bach's Harpsichords', *Festa Musicologica XIV: Essays in Honor of George J. Buelow*, ed. Thomas J. Mathiesen / Benito V. Rivera, Stuyvesant 1995, p. 306f.; John Koster, "The Harpsichord Culture in Bach's Environs", *Bach Perspectives* 4, 1999, p. 64f. and Edward L. Kottick, *A History of the Harpsichord*, Bloomington / Indianapolis 2003, p. 191f. and 350f.

¹⁴ Koster 1999, p. 58f; Kottick 2003, p. 176f, 191f, 301f and 350f.

¹⁵ Kottick 2003, picture on p. 184.

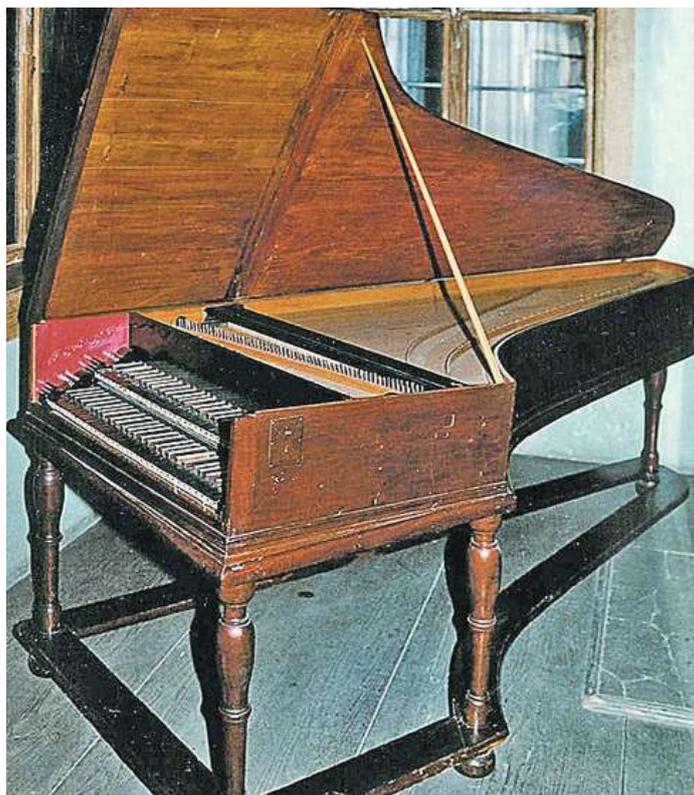


Fig. 2 Johann Heinrich Harraß, Breitenbach, ca. 1695.

Schloßmuseum Sondershausen, harpsichord with two manuals from F₁ to f³; I 8' + 4', II 8'.

The fact that German harpsichords were often built by organ builders as products of their secondary activities is also evident from the names of late 18th century harpsichord stops: for example on the lower manual *Flöte* 8' and *Octav* 4', on the upper manual above *Cornet* 8' and *Spinet* 8' (with leather dampers as an option on the *Cornet*). Two stops sometimes used the same set of strings. In this way, colourful registrations could be realised at relatively low cost. Pedal manuals were rare (but common on clavichords, the standard practice instruments for organists); 16' stops were also exceptional before 1750. A lute stop was often added.¹⁶ From the descriptions and construction of surviving large instruments and from reconstructions of surviving harpsichords with brass strings, some researchers deduce that the sound was full and penetrating and the attack sharp: more speaking than singing.¹⁷

Harpsichords for accompaniment were subject to other requirements than instruments for solo playing. For solo playing, simple instruments were usually sufficient: there is a large repertoire of harpsichord music that can be performed on one manual. But the accompanying instruments had to be large and above all loud. This is illustrated by dozens of advertisements from the 18th century, in which mostly second-hand harpsichords, i.e. older ones, were offered for sale.¹⁸

¹⁶ Hubert Henkel, "Der Cembalobau der Bach-Zeit im sächsisch-thüringischen und im Berliner Raum", *Bericht über die Wissenschaftliche Konferenz zum III. Internationalen Bach-Fest der DDR, Leipzig, 18./19. September 1975*, Winfried Hoffmann / Armin Schneiderheinze (editors), Leipzig 1977, p. 361f.; Koster 1999, p. 70f.; Siegbert Rampe, "Cembalo und Spinett", *Bachs Klavier- und Orgelwerke. Das Handbuch*, hrsg. v. Siegbert Rampe, Laaber 2008, p. 35f., 293f. and 303f.

¹⁷ Stauffer 1995, p. 317f.; Ahrens 2008, p. 126.

¹⁸ Ahrens 2008, p. 128.

'Small' harpsichords had only one manual. The vast majority of the harpsichords advertised were two-manual and had the standard disposition: I 8' + 4'; II 8'.¹⁹ These instruments were always called 'large' (*groß*). A number of such descriptions follow below:²⁰

Two well-conditioned harpsichords [...] one is in the French style with silver-plated fittings, the other in the Berlin style for use in large concerts (Hamburg 1717)

(Zwo wohlconditionirte Flügel [...] einer ist auff Französische Art mit versilberten Beschlag, der andere auff Berlinsche in grossen Concerten zu gebrauchen)

... a large harpsichord of four stops, with two manuals and coupling, which can do very good service in concerts (Hamburg 1758)

([...] ein großes Clavicymbel von vier Registern [...], mit zwey Clavieren [...] und Koppelung, welches in Concerten sehr gute Dienste thun kann [...])

... and because of its strong sound can be used very well with a large orchestra (Gotha 1796)

([...] und wegen seines starken Klanges bey einem großen Orchester sehr wohl gebraucht werden kann)

The tone is so prompt and strong that it qualifies excellently for accompaniment (Leipzig 1799)

([...] Der Ton ist so prompt und stark, daß er sich zum Accompagnement ganz vorzüglich qualificirt)

The harpsichord remained the usual accompanying instrument outside the church until well after Bach's death. It was only around 1800 that it was gradually superseded as such by the pianoforte.²¹ The question at the beginning of this section, whether harpsichords used in central Germany in the 18th century had a loud and penetrating tone, seems to be answered in the affirmative as far as the instruments used for accompaniment are concerned.

The organ was the standard continuo instrument in German church music, but in several places, including Leipzig, the harpsichord was used in addition to the organ. It was often played by the conductor himself. In the midst of his musicians he could keep them playing to the beat more easily; moreover, he could clearly indicate possible tempo changes with his accompaniment. The organ did not have these advantages.

In Germany in the 18th century German harpsichords were often used, which were mostly built by organ builders. Their tone was probably penetrating, and the *attaque* sharp. The sound character of the stops could be very different. For accompaniment purposes, mainly large two-manual instruments were used.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 130.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 124, 126, 135.

²¹ Siegbert Rampe, "Deutsche Generalbaßpraxis in der zweiten Hälfte des 18. und in der ersten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts", in Ahrens 2008, p. 62f., 89f.

2. Was the harpsichord also used by Bach as a general bass instrument?

Harpsichords in Bach's churches

There is no evidence of the use of a harpsichord in the performance of Bach's church music in Mühlhausen. The continuo part was often called *Organo*. The Himmelsburg in Weimar had a harpsichord in the organ gallery;²² it is likely that the *Kapellmeister* played it, reading from the score. Here too, Bach's continuo part is sometimes called *Organo*.

In Leipzig harpsichords were present in the *Musikhöre* of both main churches.²³ The harpsichord in the *Thomaskirche* was built by Ludovico Compenius from Halle in 1672, during the cantorate of Sebastian Knüpfer. Usually it was called *Clav(i)cymbal* or *Clavicymbel*. In 1675 it was referred to as 'the large instrument' (*das große Instrument*), in 1678 as *Spinetto*, in 1702 as 'a large spinet' (*ein großes Spinet*), and in 1709 (together with the instrument from the *Nikolaikirche*) as the 'large harpsichords that are found in both churches' (*in beyden Kirchen befindlichen großen Clavicymbeln*).²⁴ It was repaired in 1723 / 1724, at the beginning of Bach's tenure in Leipzig. As a matter of fact, during Bach's lifetime it was constantly being repaired and re-strung. According to surviving accounts, it was maintained (*accomodirt*) and tuned every year, half year or quarter.²⁵ In 1756, during the cantorate of Johann Friedrich Doles, it was replaced by a new - relatively inexpensive - one-manual harpsichord, because the old one had a broken soundboard, a case with woodworm and worn-out jacks.²⁶

A similar harpsichord was present in the *Nikolaikirche*, at least since 1693, but possibly much longer. Bach had this harpsichord repaired in 1724. It has been demonstrated that it had been regularly tuned and maintained since 1732.²⁷ Permission to buy another instrument was given in 1756; already in 1769 permission was given to replace it; this was done in 1770; this instrument, too, was apparently one-manual.²⁸ In 1709 Johann Kuhnau asked for a fund for the maintenance of the 'large harpsichords' in both churches.¹ Tuning during Bach's lifetime was done by Christian Lehmann, Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, Zacharias Hildebrandt, Johann Gottlob Neuhaus and sometimes by Bach himself.²⁹ The harpsichords in Leipzig were often explicitly called 'large'. As described above in § 1 they were probably two-manual and the sound was full and penetrating.

²² Winfried Schrammek, "Orgel, Positiv, Clavicymbel und Glocken der Schloßkirche zu Weimar, 1658 bis 1774", *Bericht über die Wissenschaftliche Konferenz zum V. Internationalen Bach-Fest der DDR*, 1985, Winfried Hoffmann / Armin Schneiderheinze (editors), Leipzig 1988, p. 105. For the performance of a *Markus-Passion* (attributed to Reinhard Kaiser) in 1713, a continuo part in *Kammerton* was written with the heading *Cembalo*: Bruce Haynes, *A History of Performing Pitch: The story of "A"*, Lanham / Oxford 2002, p. 234.

²³ Bernd Heyder, "Bachs Instrumentarium", *Das Bach-Handbuch 2*, Reimar Emans / Sven Hiemke (editors), Laaber 2007, p. 146.

²⁴ Schering 1936, p. 61f.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 61-68.; *Dokumente GLT VIII/C 10*, p. 45; 23, p. 52; 62b, p. 83; 65, p.85; 70, p.88; 78, p. 93.

²⁶ Stauffer 1995, p. 296; *Dokumente GLT X/C 9 -11*, p. 322f; XI/C 10, p. 546.

²⁷ *BD II*, no. 161, p. 122f. and no. 190, p. 148; Emans 2008, p. 145; *Dokumente GLT VIII/C 66*, p. 86; 69, p. 87;

²⁸ *Dokumente GLT X/C 10, 12*, p. 322f; 40, 42, 45, p. 344ff; XI/C 10, p. 546.

²⁹ Stauffer 1995, p. 295.

The harpsichord in Bach's continuo parts

Whenever an apparently complete set of parts of a cantata has survived, these include the following three continuo parts:

1. One transposed and usually figured part. This part, transposed down a whole tone, was always meant for the organ. It was notated in *Chorton*, i.e. a whole tone higher than *Kammerton*. Yet these parts, which will therefore be called *organ parts* further on in this chapter, nearly always bear the name *Continuo* (fig. 3).



Fig. 3. *Erforsche mich Gott* BWV 136, beginning, organ part, Figured, transposed down from A to G.

Of the surviving organ parts, 11% are not figured and 29% are partly figured.³⁰ Apparently, it was possible to accompany on the organ from an unfigured part, although this was not ideal. Several authors of Bach's time agreed with this.³¹ Often in chorales or recitatives there is a separate bar above the organ part with the vocal melody, sometimes together with figures (fig. 4). In partly-figured organ parts figures or melodies are rarely missing in recitatives.



Fig. 4. BWV 136, organ part, beginning of mov. 2, recitative with vocal melody stave and figures.

2. One untransposed and unfigured part. It was evidently intended for continuo instruments on which one cannot play chords: cello, violone and/or bassoon (fig. 5).

³⁰ Checked with *BC* and *Bdig*.

³¹ See chapter XX (*The general bass*).



Fig. 5. BWV 136, continuo part, unfigured, untransposed in A, beginning.

3. One untransposed and - sometimes - figured part. The question arises for which instruments it was meant. Six parts are explicitly labelled *Cembalo*.³² In addition, ten parts in works by other composers performed by Bach also bear the inscription *Cembalo*. It is striking that organ parts have almost always survived in addition to these harpsichord parts. Besides the six parts expressly intended for harpsichord, there are 48 (partly) figured parts written in Leipzig for church works with the caption *Continuo* (fig. 6).³³



Fig. 6. BWV 136, harpsichord part, figured, untransposed in A, beginning.

A total of 141 of Bach's church music compositions performed in Leipzig have untransposed continuo parts, of which $6 + 48 = 54$ with figures, i.e. 38%. In addition, the vast majority (19) of the surviving works by other composers (especially Johann Ludwig Bach), performed by Bach (whether or not in an arrangement), have explicit harpsichord parts or figured untransposed continuo parts. Almost without exception, organ parts of these works have also been preserved.

As we have seen (Chapter V, *The number of instrumentalists*, § 2), Bach usually had copies written for violin 1, violin 2 and untransposed continuo (*doublets*). In the first cycle with cantatas from Leipzig probably by far the most doublets have been lost, and in cycle 2 about half (namely those from the Trinitarian period). In cycle 3, on the other hand, almost all doublets have been preserved.³⁴ One might suspect that with the lost doublets from cycles 1 and 2, especially the figured continuo parts would have disappeared too. However, the

³² These parts date partly from Bach's first years in Leipzig (BWV 6, 23.2, 109 [cover]), and partly from his last years (BWV 244.2 [1743, for chorus 2], 245.5 [version 4, 1749], 8.2 [version 1747]). An additional part marked *Cembalo* in BWV 245.5, however, is completely unfigured.

³³ BWV 3, 7, 10, 19, 20, 24, 28, 29, 30.2, 33, 34.1, 38, 40, 42, 44, 46, 48, 60, 62, 67, 69.1, 78, 81, 88, 91, 96, 101, 103, 112, 114, 120.2, 124, 133, 134, 136 (fig. 6), 147, 154, 166, 168, 169, 176, 178, 183, 195.3, 199.2, 248.2^v. Also two *Violoncello* parts of cantatas from Weimar performed in Leipzig (BWV 31.2 and 172.2) have been figured. Sources: *Kritische Berichte* at the NBA; BC; BDig; Dreyfus 1987, p. 32f.

Dreyfus' list of (partially) figured parts (p. 49f.) is very incomplete.

³⁴ Checked with BC and BDig.

opposite is true: the number of figured parts is in percentage terms the highest in volume 1 and the lowest in volume 3. The proportion of figured continuo parts in the cantatas from the period after Trinity Sunday of the second volume is not anomalously low either. Apparently, the doublets in particular were mostly unfigured (but not always). It can be concluded that the mentioned proportion of cantatas with a (partly or completely) figured untransposed continuo part of about 38% could be common, even when doublets are absent nowadays.

There can be no doubt about the instrument for which the figured continuo parts were intended. Apart from the surviving organ parts, there was no need for an extra organ part, which was notated in *Kammerton*; in Chapter XVIII, *The Organ*, in § 2 it has been made plausible that all organs in Leipzig, including the *Trauungspositiv*, were in *Chorton*. In Chapter XXV (*The Lute*), it will be shown that the lute does not qualify either. Then only the harpsichord remains as a possibility. The figured, non-transposed continuo parts will therefore be called *harpsichord parts* from now on, even though it is likely that the music was read along from the harpsichord by players of other continuo instruments such as cello, violone and bassoon (chapter V, § 2).

The six parts marked *Cembalo* are (apart from the copy for BWV 245.5) all fully figured. Some of the 48 untransposed continuo parts with figures are also fully or largely figured.³⁵ Much more often than with the organ parts, however, the harpsichord parts are only partly figured, sometimes in only one movement.³⁶ Other continuo parts are merely figured at the beginning: sometimes the figuring already stops after a small number of systems, possibly due to lack of time.³⁷ What strikes one most, however, are the continuo parts, in which only a few notes are figured, or even only one.³⁸ These are clearly not mistakes. Even one figured bass note indicates the playing of chords, and not only on that one note of course (*figs.* 7 and 8).



Fig. 7. Herr Gott Beherrscher aller Dingen BWV 120.2, part Continuo, movement 1, mm. 35-46.

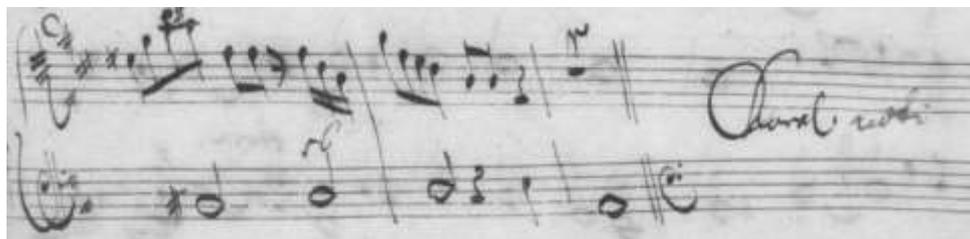


Fig. 8. Mein liebster Jesu ist verloren, BWV 154, Part Continuo, recitative movement 2, m. 6-8 (with notes tenor).

³⁵ BWV 7, 10, 19, 29, 31.2, 33, 40, 42, 67, 81, 96, 124, 136, 147, 168, 169, 172.2, 176, 199.2 and 248.2^{IV}.

³⁶ BWV 20, 28, 30.2, 38, 48, 60, 62, 91, 101, 114, 134.2, 178, 183 and 195.3.

³⁷ BWV 3, 24, 44, 48 [opening chorus], 112 and 166.

³⁸ BWV 34.1 (4 chords in the first recitative), 69.1 (5 bars of mov. 1), 78 (5 chords in recitative mov. 3), 88 (1 chord in recitative mov. 6), 103 (2 chords in recitative mov. 4), 120.1 (2 bars in part 1), 133 (3 chords, divided over both recitatives) and 154 (1 chord in recitative mov. 2).

Apparently, Bach's harpsichordists often had to make do with limited figuring; sometimes even hardly any figuring at all. It is obvious then that they – like organists – could also play from completely unfigured continuo parts. Assumedly the harpsichordists - private pupils of Bach - received prior instruction from Bach about the accompaniment, because many chords in Bach's music can hardly be guessed at without any figuring.

Some researchers think that the number of harpsichord parts is too small to be able to draw definitive conclusions about Bach's use of the harpsichord. But 38% is not a small number. If, moreover, harpsichord parts could apparently have been unfigured, the claim that this number is small is untenable: any continuo part could then have been used by an advanced harpsichordist. Continuo parts, moreover, were often not figured until after 1740.³⁹ This suggests that Bach initially conducted from the score on the harpsichord, but later in his life he left the harpsichord accompaniment more and more to a student. It is quite possible that Bach did not perform some of his cantatas at all in this later period, in which case the lack of figured continuo parts is even more understandable.

In sixteen cases, most of them re-performances in the period 1732-1735, Bach left the organ out in some cantata movements. A problem with the organ or the organist has been mentioned as a reason for this but an aesthetic consideration is more likely: these are nearly always arias for a small ensemble. Apparently, the harpsichordist accompanied here alone, without an organist. Possible absence of a keyboard instrument goes against the deep-rooted conviction that a general-bass instrument in the continuo was indispensable. In later performances of the works mentioned, the organ was reinstated in a number of cases.⁴⁰ Indications that the harpsichord was not used in one or more movements of the *Music* (such as an entry *Cembalo tacet*) are completely absent.

The harpsichord in Bach's scores

In a large number of scores the continuo staff contains some sketchy figures (*fig.* 9a-d), often on only one note or on a small number of notes. For the greater part, but not exclusively, the figures are found in recitatives, and mainly noted down in places where the harmony is not obvious.⁴¹ 76 of the total of 109 scores consulted contained such sketchy figures, amounting

³⁹ Yoshitake Kobayashi, "Bachs Eingriffe in wiederaufgeführte Werke", "Die Zeit, die Tag und Jahre macht". Bericht über das Internationale wissenschaftliche Colloquium aus Anlaß des 80. Geburtstages von Alfred Dürr 1998, Martin Staehelin (editor), Göttingen 2001, p. 99.

⁴⁰ For details and other kinds of differentiation see Chapter XVIII, *The Organ*, § 3.

⁴¹ 24 cantatas from the first cycle (*Fig.* 9a): BWV 75/2, 4, 9; 76/1, 2,6, 9, 13; 24/3, 4; 186 (complete); 105/2; 77/1, 2, 4, 5; 138/2; 48/1, 2, 5, 7; 109/1, 2, 3; 163/1, 2, 5, 6; 90/4; 154/1 (full), 2; 155/1 (full), 2, 3; 81/2; 144/1; 66.3/2, 4; 134.3/1, 3, 5, 6; 67/1, 5; 12/1, 3, 4, 6; 44/5, 147/1, 3, 5; 182 (full); 152?/3, 5, 6; 59?/1.

17 cantatas of the second cycle, including the non-chorale cantatas (*Fig.* 9b): BWV 2/2; 135/2; 177/1, 5; 99/2; 96/3; 91/2, 4, 5; 121/1, 3, 5; 133/3, 5; 41/3, 5; 14/2; 92/2, 5, 7; 127/1, 3?; 249.4/4, 6, 7; 42/1; 103/1; 87/2, 3; 175/3.

24 cantatas from the third cycle (*Fig.* 9c): BWV 39/1; 88/2; 187/1?,5; 168/4; 102/2,5; 51/3; 27/1; 47/1,3,4; 49/3,5; 55/2,4?; 52/2; 36/2; 57/2; 28/2,4; 16/2; 58/1,2,4; 32/4; 13/4; 43/2; 34.2/2,3; 30.2/2,4,11; 19/1,3; 79/4; 82.1/1,2,3.

11 other works (*Fig.* 9d): BWV 119/1, 6; 197.2/2, 195.3/6, 120.2/5, 11/3, 9; 248.2/4, 15, 39, 40, 55, 58; 243.2/1, 3; 245.4/8, 10, 18a, 21g, 25a, 27c.

Even in the first version of the motet BWV 118.1 (ca. 1737, with trombones), the score contains figures for the third trombone, which is notated in *Kammerton*; it plays the bass line and thus actually fulfils the continuo function.

to 67%. Copyists did not make use of these markings: Bach himself made a neat figuring on the copied parts.⁴² There are two possible answers to the question why the score contains such a summary figuring:

1. Those numbers were a reminder during the composition process, and
2. The score was used for the harpsichord accompaniment. The second explanation seems more plausible to the author of this study.

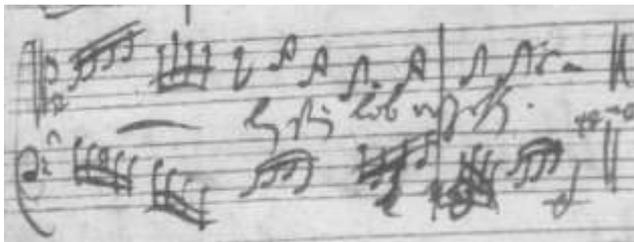


Fig. 9a. BWV 76 (first cycle),
score, recitative mov. 13.
Figuring (4 # 2 #) on final note.

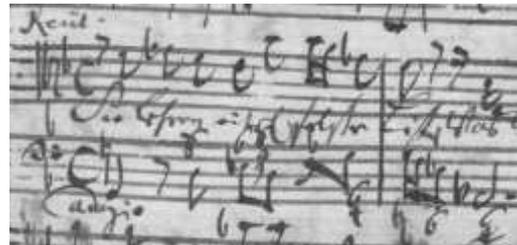


Fig. 9b. BWV 2 (second cycle),
Score, recitative mov. 2.
Figuring on a series of notes.

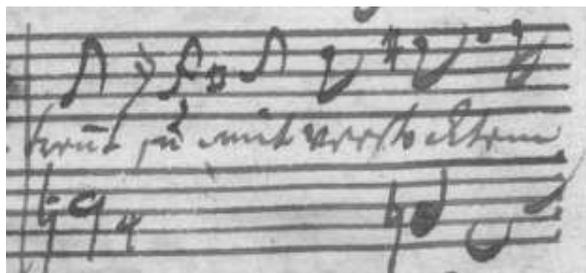


Fig. 9c. BWV 88 (third cycle),
score, recitative mov. 2, m. 5.
Figuring (4) on first note.

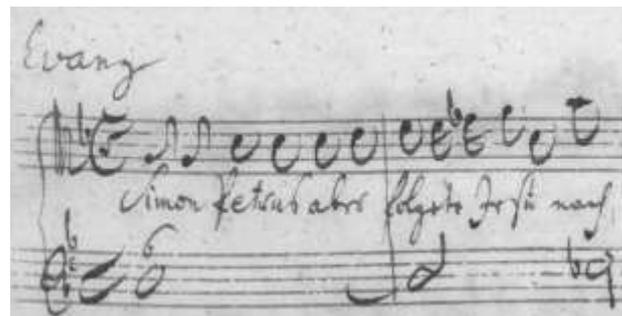


Fig. 9d. BWV 245.4 (Johannes-Passion)
score, recitative mov. 8, m. 1
Figuring (6) on first note.

The 'Harpsichord Question'

The idea that Bach might have used the harpsichord as a continuo instrument in his church music, in addition to the organ, has been hotly debated. The most important opinions from this discussion, known as 'the Harpsichord Question' (*die Cembalo-Frage*), are listed below.

In 1872, Heinrich Bellermann assumed (based on his observations of Georg Friedrich Handel's music) that the organ sounded in the choruses and chorales, but the harpsichord in the recitatives and arias, i.e. as suggested by Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach.⁴³ Philipp Spitta rejected this idea already in 1873: according to him, only the organ could interpret the soul of German church music. *If* the harpsichord was used at all, it must have been during rehearsals.⁴⁴ Max Seiffert opposed this in 1904. Organ and harpsichord should sound together in the

For a large number of cantatas the scores have not been preserved. Moreover, a number of scores cannot be consulted via *Bach-Digital*; these have not been included in this counting. In addition, scores in which a transposed organ staff has been included instead of a continuo staff, have been left out.

⁴² Dreyfus 1987, p. 32-38.

⁴³ Heinrich Bellermann, "Robert Franz' Bearbeitungen älterer Tonwerke", in *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* VII, 1872, no. 31, p. 489-495.; no. 32, p. 505-510.; no. 33, p. 521-526, especially p. 508f.

⁴⁴ Philipp Spitta, *Johann Sebastian Bach*, Erster Band, Leipzig 1916 (Spitta I), p. 717, 827-830.

choruses and chorales, but only the harpsichord in recitatives and arias. Seiffert based this assumption on the aforementioned passage by Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach and on two of the cantatas discussed above, in which Bach left the organ silent in the middle sections. Seiffert thus suggested (partial) 'double accompaniment' for the first time.⁴⁵ In 1915 Max Schneider was also of the opinion that organ and harpsichord should both be used to keep the musicians together (whether or not both sounded simultaneously Schneider left open).⁴⁶ Charles Sanford Terry endorsed the use of both instruments in 1932, but assumed that Bach mainly used the harpsichord when the organ was being repaired.⁴⁷

Arnold Schering was very influential.⁴⁸ According to Schering, the harpsichord was characteristic of the Italian opera style, which would not fit in with German church music. In 1936 he searched for possible arguments to refute indications for harpsichord use. For instance, figured, non-transposed continuo parts should be considered as parts for rehearsals, or for an organ positive in chamber tone. The harpsichords in the churches would only have been used for the Bodenschatz motets at the beginning of services and during organ repairs. If merely the recitatives were figured, the cellists probably played chords. Parts explicitly assigned to the harpsichord would be an exception. Two years later Fritz Müller debunked Schering's ideas.⁴⁹ He recalled that the *Christmas Oratorio* was composed of secular cantatas, that the continuo part in Bodenschatz' motets was expressly intended for organ and that Bach himself played the harpsichord during the performance of the *Trauerode*. Müller considered the chord playing on the cello to be far-fetched. That only a harpsichord part has survived for the second choir of the *Matthäus-Passion*, and that this would prove that the first choir was only accompanied by organ (as Schneider claimed), Müller called illogical: after all Bach himself could have played the harpsichord for the first choir.

Nevertheless, Spitta's and Schering's views seem to be responsible for the fact that today the harpsichord is absent in the majority of performances (including 'historically informed performances') of Bach's church music. Also in the second half of the 20th century, many musicians insisted on accompaniment by the organ alone. The same holds for the musicologists responsible for the *NBA*. They regularly suggested that the harpsichord must have been used in emergencies alone, for example when the organ was being repaired.⁵⁰ Only in 1987 Laurence Dreyfus expressed the opinion, in his study *Bach's Continuo Group*, that double accompaniment with Bach was more common practice than was previously assumed.⁵¹

Arguments against/for double accompaniment

In this discussion it is agreed that basically the organist always played along. However, it is different with the use of the harpsichord. Below, the arguments against (*contra*) and in favour of (*pro*) double accompaniment are mentioned successively, and commented on.

⁴⁵ Max Seiffert, "Praktische Bearbeitungen Bachscher Kompositionen", *BJ* 1, 1904, p. 64ff.

⁴⁶ Max Schneider, "Der Generalbaass Johann Sebastian Bachs", *Jahrbuch der Musikbibliothek Peters* 21/22, 1914/1915, p. 27-32.

⁴⁷ Charles Sanford Terry, *Bach's Orchestra*, London 1932, p. 164f.

⁴⁸ Schering 1936, p. 48-53, 76-89, 96-137, especially p. 48-53.

⁴⁹ Fritz Müller, "Vom Cembalo in Joh. Seb. Bachs Kirchenmusik", *Acta Musicologica*, 10/1-2, 1938, p. 46-48.

⁵⁰ For example, Alfred Dürr, *NBA* II.5, *Kritischer Bericht*, Kassel 1974, p. VIII; Arthur Mendel, *NBA* II/4, *Kritischer Bericht*, Kassel 1974, p. VI.

⁵¹ Dreyfus 1987, p. 10-71.

Contra:

1. Only the organ can represent the soul of German church music; the harpsichord is Italian and worldly (Spitta, Schering).⁵²

This argument is not based on treatises from Bach's time, but on philosophies from the Romantic period.⁵³
2. The harpsichord was only used at rehearsals (Spitta).⁵⁴

There is no evidence of this. It cannot apply to rehearsals at the *Thomasschule*: as far as we know the school did not own a harpsichord (it did possess organs).⁵⁵ But harpsichords were present in Bach's residence, which was included in the school.
3. The harpsichord was only used to accompany motets from Bodenschatz's collection (Schering).⁵⁶

This is both illogical and purely speculative.
4. The organ that was known as the *Trauungspositiv* (§ VII.2) might have been in *Kammerton*, so the figured *Kammerton* parts were intended for an organ positive (Schering).⁵⁷

In 1769, however, an anonymous person reported: 'In Leipzig, the organs that existed in J.S. Bach's time are certainly all in the *Chorton*' (*Zu Leipzig stehen die Orgeln, die zu Herrn J.S. Bachs Zeit vorhanden waren, ganz gewiss alle im Chor-tone*).⁵⁸ The marriage positive may have been used for the *Kleine Brautmesse* BWV 250-252; the organ part in that cantata is also notated in *Chorton*. The *Nikolaikirche* also had an organ positive, which must have been used for the second choir in the *Matthäus-Passion* BWV 244.2 (Chapter XVIII, *The Organ*, § 2); this part is notated in *Chorton* too.
5. To have a harpsichordist play along would cost an extra player. Bach was far too practical for this (Schering).⁵⁹

If Bach, however, considered the harpsichord important enough he would undoubtedly have employed an extra player - in so far as he did not already perform this task himself.
6. The harpsichord was only used when the organ was being repaired (Schering, Dürr, Mendel).⁶⁰

This happened only four times: in the *Nikolaikirche* in 1725 (July-November) and in 1726-1727 (indefinitely) and in the *Thomaskirche* in 1730 (Lent) and 1747 (July-October). About the organ repair in 1725, Riemers Chronik reports: 'One has continued to play on it although construction was going on' (*Man hat doch*

⁵² Spitta I, p. 827f.; Schering 1936, p. 51-53; Dreyfus 1987 p. 14f.

⁵³ Dreyfus 1987, p. 20f.

⁵⁴ Spitta I, p. 830.

⁵⁵ Philipp Spitta, *Johann Sebastian Bach*, Zweiter Band, Leipzig 21916 (Spitta II), p. 774.

⁵⁶ Schering 1936, p. 129-137.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 70f.

⁵⁸ *BD* III, no. 755, p. 204.

⁵⁹ Schering 1936, p. 89.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 89-96; Dürr 1974, p. 116; Mendel 1974, p. 98.

continuïrlich darauf gespielt ohngeacht fortgebaut worden).⁶¹ Moreover, an organ-positive will have fulfilled the function of the great organ better than the harpsichord.

7. Bach used the harpsichord mainly for compositions by others. Apparently the musicians needed more support (Reinmar Emans).⁶²

Bach used the harpsichord – in absolute numbers – more often in his own music, which is usually more complex.

8. The harpsichord was not mentioned in the list of instruments in the 1730 memorandum (Emans).⁶³

This does not mean anything, especially if the harpsichord was played by Bach himself, or by private pupils. After all, the organ and the organist were not mentioned in the list either, because an organist, like a harpsichordist, did not have to be withdrawn from the group of city musicians or from the group of *Thomasschule* pupils.

9. Contemporary musicians sometimes object to the idea of double accompaniment, because the harpsichord tone would not be audible enough in the hall without a lid, and because the organ and harpsichord would detune differently when placed in a heated concert hall.⁶⁴

This could indicate that the harpsichord's intonation was (too) mild compared to that of Bach's instruments, or that the number of used stops was too small, or that the acoustics of the room were different. For the churches in Bach's time, tuning due to temperature changes was less of a problem, because they were virtually unheated.

10. The pitch purity of the organ and harpsichord when played together left much to be desired (Schering).⁶⁵

However, this was apparently not a problem for many musicians in Bach's time, even though the harpsichord was tuned in *Kammerton* and the organ in *Chorton*. Even when the organ and harpsichord were tuned differently, Bach evidently did not consider this to be a decisive factor.

11. The danger of *clashes* has been pointed out, when organ and harpsichord accompany in different ways.⁶⁶

Organ and harpsichord were expected to be played in different ways (Chapter XX, *The general bass*). Mattheson even recommended two harpsichords in addition to the organ for large ensembles;⁶⁷ apparently this was common practice in opera.^κ,⁶⁸ Apparently, this was also not a problem at the time.

⁶¹ Dreyfus 1987, p. 26f.

⁶² Emans 2008, p. 143f.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

⁶⁴ Ton Koopman, "Recording Bach's early cantatas", *Early Music* 24/4, 1996, p. 612.

⁶⁵ Schering 1936, p. 88f.

⁶⁶ Dreyfus 1987, p. 69.

⁶⁷ Mattheson 1739, p. 484, § 29.

⁶⁸ See also C.P.E. Bach 1762, p. 315.

Pro:

1. The fact that double accompaniment was more common in Germany and that the practice in Leipzig was even held up as an example, as mentioned above.
2. The advantages of harpsichord accompaniment, as mentioned above.
3. The presence and continuous maintenance of the harpsichords in the churches in Leipzig, as mentioned above.
4. The surviving harpsichord parts, together with often identical organ parts, are also mentioned above. This number is larger than is often assumed.

But perhaps Bach only applied double accompaniment in his repertoire in the last ten years of his life, according to Yoshitake Kobayashi and Emans, because the parts were often not figured until then.⁶⁹

This view ignores the possibility that Bach himself played from his score.

5. The above-mentioned sketchy figuring of the continuo staff notated in *Kammerton* in many scores suggests that they have been used to play the harpsichord.
6. The indication *tasto solo* in some organ parts (BWV 114, 169, 29, 248.2^{IV}) and parts which show that the organist did not play in all movements.
7. The only surviving record of a performance by Bach of a *Music in a Church* (*Trauerode* BWV 198, 1727), which mentions that Bach himself played the harpsichord.^L

Perhaps this was a special case: it was not a regular church service; moreover, the performance did not take place in the *Thomaskirche* or *Nikolaikirche*. The newspaper report states that the music was composed in the Italian style; perhaps that is why the harpsichordist accompanied instead of the organist.

Moreover, the reporter made mistakes in his report; perhaps he could not see Bach performing in the organ gallery.⁷⁰

8. On the cover of the *Sanctus* from the *Missa Superba* by Johann Kaspar Kerll (BWV 241, in E), which Bach arranged, all the participating instruments are mentioned as an exception, instead of the all-embracing word *Continuo*. According to this cover, the continuo group comprised: *Bassono, Violoncello, Cembalo e l'Organo*. Parts of this piece still exist for *Cembalo* and *Organo*. It was Bach's idea to have two accompanying instruments: the original by Kerll only says *con Organo e Violone*.⁷¹

This is a very late arrangement (1749). Perhaps Bach did want double accompaniment only at that time.

9. Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach reported that Bach liked to conduct the orchestra by playing the violin and that he could control the musicians better with the violin than with the harpsichord.^M

This report shows that conducting from the harpsichord was common practice. As already suggested (chapter VII, *Bach as conductor*), Bach's son may have been referring mainly to Bach's conducting of the *Collegium Musicum*; after all, he mentions the orchestra.

⁶⁹ Kobayashi 1998, p. 99; Emans 2008, p. 146f.

⁷⁰ Joshua Rifkin, "Performance questions in Bach's *Trauerode*", *Bach studies* 2, Daniel R. Melamed (editor), Cambridge 1995, p. 143f.

⁷¹ Dreyfus 1987, p. 48.

10. In 1724, Bach wanted to perform the *Johannes-Passion* in the *Thomaskirche*, but was told that according to the annual schedule it should be performed in the *Nikolaikirche*. Bach protested, one reason being that the harpsichord in the *Nikolaikirche* needed to be 'somewhat repaired' (*etwas reparirt*). Apparently he considered the use of the harpsichord essential. ^N Moreover, a figured harpsichord part has been preserved from a later performance of the *Johannes-Passion* (alongside an unfigured harpsichord part; the inscription *Cembalo* may be a copying error).
11. There are several testimonies by and for students who enriched *the church services* with harpsichord playing, such as Friedrich Gottlob Wild, who received a testimony in 1727, which explicitly mentions his participation as a harpsichordist in the services. ^O Furthermore there are testimonies for Johann Friedrich Agricola, who studied with Bach in 1738-1741 and reported in 1752 that he played harpsichord during Bach's performance of church music by Telemann, ^P and Johann Christian Kittel, Bach's pupil in 1748-1750, who at the age of 76 recalled that Bach always (!) had one of his best pupils, including Kittel himself, play the harpsichord during the performance of cantatas. ^Q The harpsichord is also mentioned in testimonials for other pupils, but not explicitly their participation in the services. ⁷²
12. Johann Matthias Gesner, Rector of the *Thomasschule* from 1729 to 1734, gave a lyrical description in Latin of the conductor Bach in 1738. This passage can only be understood if Bach conducted from the harpsichord, because Gesner first says that the harpsichord contains many zithers, and then describes Bach's conducting as a singer who accompanies himself on the zither and at the same time directs everything and everyone around him. The passage apparently refers to a work in large scale with amateur musicians, complicated music and little rehearsal time. ^R This is probably a description of a rehearsal. But even then the harpsichord was played in the church; as far as we know the school did not own a harpsichord at all.

All in all, it can be said that the arguments *pro* are much stronger than the arguments *contra*.

An analysis of the scores and parts of Bach's church music in Leipzig, and the arguments against and in favour of 'double accompaniment' presented in publications, leads to the conclusion that Bach had the organ and the harpsichord play together as general-bass instruments.

3. To what extent did Bach include the harpsichord in his church music in Leipzig and who played the instrument?

Bach's harpsichordists

Bach himself, his *Thomasschule* pupils and his private students were exclusively eligible for the harpsichord accompaniment in Bach's cantatas,

⁷² Johann Adolph Scheibe, 1731, BD I, no. 68, p. 136f.; Johann Christoph Dorn, 1731, BD I, no. 69, p. 138; Johann Ludwig Krebs, 1735, BD I, no. 71, p. 139; Christian Gottlob Wunsch, 1743, BD I, no. 78, p. 145.

That Bach himself played the harpsichord is almost self-evident. *Kapellmeisters* usually led their orchestra from behind their harpsichord. They were sitting centrally among the musicians and were thus best able to direct them. Moreover, there are descriptions of Bach's conducting from the harpsichord (see above, arguments *pro* double accompaniment 7 and 12). Mattheson's recommendations of a *director* who plays and sings at the same time can be found in Gesner's description.^{E, R} Bach must have played from his score. An indication is the brief figuring in no fewer than 67% of his scores, as mentioned in section 2. Bach only notated a chord in crucial places. From the number of scores with such notation it may be concluded that Bach conducted at least 67% of these works from the harpsichord. At the very least, because in other scores he may not have needed such indications. This could also apply to the *Matthäus-Passion* BWV 244.2: the score does not contain any figuring. The score is a new version of a work that Bach had already performed several times. He therefore knew it well and the composer probably did not need any figuring. Whether the autographic scores of earlier versions of the *Matthäus-Passion* also contained figuring is impossible to ascertain: these did not survive. A number of cantatas with organ solos also show that Bach probably played from the score: these solos are noted in *Chorton* in the score. If, for instance, one of his sons played the part, Bach would have made do without the score, which seems unlikely.⁷³

The use of *Thomasschule* pupils is an important item in the memorandum (1730).⁷⁴ However, the harpsichord is not mentioned. This is quite logical: the harpsichordist had a central role and therefore should have had a decent education in playing the harpsichord and in playing with or without figures. In addition, he should have rhythmic supremacy to keep the musicians together, of which *Thomasschule* pupils were probably not - yet - capable. And if Bach ever had a *Thomasschule* pupil who was skilful enough to perform this task, the same applies to this pupil as to his harpsichord students (see below).

Finally, it is certain that Bach sometimes made harpsichord students play the harpsichord accompaniment. One can speculate about his motives.

1. Bach was responsible for the training of these pupils: they had to be prepared for a later profession as *Kapellmeister* and experience was needed for that job. The testimony for Wild from 1727, mentioned above in *pro*-argument no. 11, supports this hypothesis.
2. It is possible that later in life Bach suffered from trembling and cramp in his hands (*Zitterkrampf*), which made playing the harpsichord increasingly difficult. Gradual changes in Bach's handwriting since 1735 are indications of this inconvenience.⁷⁵ It explains why many of the continuo parts were figured in these years and why a number of parts with the *Cembalo* heading date from this period.⁷⁶ Kobayashi uses Bach's handwriting changes over the years to show that Bach may have suffered a stroke in

⁷³ Rifkin 1995, p. 147f.

⁷⁴ Johann Sebastian Bach, *Kurtzer, iedoch höchstnöthiger Entwurff einer wohlbestallten Kirchen Music; nebst einigem unvorgreiflichen Bedencken von dem Verfall derselben*. Letter to the Leipzig Council, 23. August 1730 ('Memorandum'), *BD I*, nr. 22, p. 60ff.

⁷⁵ Georg von Dadelsen, *Beiträge zur Chronologie der Werke Johann Sebastian Bachs*, *Thübingen Bachstudien* Heft 4/5, Trossingen 1958, p. 107-118; Yoshitake Kobayashi, "Bemerkungen zur Spätschrift Johann Sebastian Bachs" in Hoffmann / Schneiderheinze 1988, p. 457.

⁷⁶ Kobayashi 1998, p. 99.

August or September 1748, which made it difficult for him to conduct from the harpsichord.⁷⁷ Kittel's recollection of the years 1748-1750 (see above) supports this hypothesis.

3. Perhaps Bach preferred to conduct his musicians himself as a violinist (see above, *pro-argument* 9). However, this seems less obvious in the churches, as explained in Chapter VIII, *Bach's Direction*.
4. It is conceivable that Bach preferred to have his hands free to strike the beat (*idem*).

That Bach had his (private) students play the harpsichord is plausible from the 38% of continuo parts, which contain at least some figures (§ 2). One might think that he accompanied certain cantatas himself on the harpsichord; others were accompanied by private students. However, this is not clear from the surviving scores and parts. There is no statistic relationship between figured scores and figured parts. For many cantatas both figured scores and parts are in existence.⁷⁸ This supports the assumption that in the first years in Leipzig Bach mainly accompanied himself and in later years he put on students for this purpose.

The extent to which the harpsichordist played with Bach.

Dreyfus assumes that Bach used the harpsichord from time to time,⁷⁹ but it is more likely that Bach used it all the time. After all, it seems illogical that Bach would work without a harpsichord if he considered its use so essential that he would not perform his *Johannes-Passion* without one (see above, *pro-argument* 10). Moreover, it is difficult to think of arguments on the basis of which he would decide to use the harpsichord one time and not the next. The argument that he did not have a good player available does not stand up, because he could always play himself. And Kittel says that, at least in the years around 1749, Bach had a number of proficient students to choose from and that he always had such a good student play the harpsichord.

That no more harpsichord parts have survived can be explained in two ways. In the first place, it was probably standard practice for Bach to play from his own score. Secondly, proficient students - after instruction by the master - could apparently also play from unfigured parts, as appears from many harpsichord parts, partly or hardly figured at all. Besides, the organist had to make do with an entirely unfigured part (at least) fifteen times, in addition with many only partly figured parts.

According to Dreyfus, there are no indications that Bach used the harpsichord in the *Matthäus-Passion* (in contrast to the *Johannes-Passion*). The late harpsichord part for the second choir would show that in the last known performance of the work (probably in 1743) he replaced the organ of the second choir by a harpsichord (*fig.* 10).⁸⁰

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 461.

⁷⁸ Checked with *BC* and *Bdig*.

⁷⁹ Dreyfus 1987, p. 68f.

⁸⁰ Dreyfus 1987, p. 40.



Fig. 10. BWV 244.2, harpsichord part 2nd choir, beginning.

This reasoning requires some correction. If Bach considered the harpsichord essential for the *Johannes-Passion* (see § 2, *pro*-argument 10), it is unclear why this should not be the case for the *Matthäus-Passion*. As Bach had to staff two continuo groups in addition to two instrumental groups for his new version, finding sufficient musicians may have been problematic. But this did not concern the harpsichordist of the first choir: it is obvious that Bach himself played the harpsichord. The harpsichord of the second choir may have been played by a proficient student - after instruction by Bach - from an unfigured continuo part in 1737. Perhaps in 1743, Bach no longer had such a capable pupil available and he had to take care of the figuring. It is also possible that Bach did not have a harpsichordist available for the second choir in 1737 but that he did have one in 1743. Finally, it is possible that the *Nikolai*-positive, which also accompanied the second choir, was not available at this late stage (there is no indication of this); in that case the harpsichord was indispensable. An indication for this could be the use of a chords playing *viola da gamba* in the *accompagnato*-recitative "Mein Jesus schweigt". But this remains only one of the possible reasons for the new harpsichord part for the second choir.

The harpsichord as a solo instrument in church music

Bach never used the harpsichord as a solo instrument in his church music. In two cases harpsichord 'solos' can be seen as an elaboration of the continuo part in broken chords. In the first version of the *Johannes-Passion* BWV 245.1 (1724) the instrumental solo part in the arioso "Betrachte meine Seel" (movement 19) was played by a lute; for the third version BWV 245.3 (ca. 1730) an insert was made with this part for organ. For the fourth version BWV 245.5 (1749), a new insert was made for the same solo, but now played by harpsichord. The solo was not included in the new figured harpsichord continuo part. A separate insert was also made for the harpsichord solo in the aria "Willkommen will ich sagen" from *Wer weiß wie nahe mir mein Ende* BWV 27, which was later, and probably erroneously, labelled *Organo obbligato*. The part is untransposed and thus intended for harpsichord (fig. 11). This is confirmed in the score with the autographic inscription *Cembalo obbligato* (fig. 12).



Fig. 11. BWV 27, harpsichord insert, beginning.

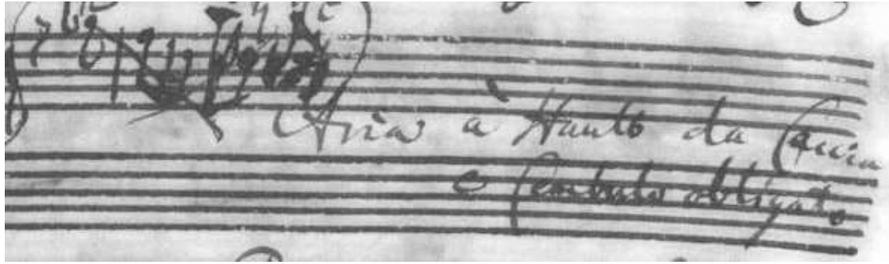


Fig. 12. BWV 27, score, title aria 3; the aria itself follows on the next page.

On the cover of the score, however, the evidently incorrect indication *Organo oblig.* is used. The organist played this aria simultaneously from the (unfigured) transposed continuo part. In the other movements of these works, the harpsichordist will have played from a continuo part. In both cases the harpsichord solos can also be considered as an elaboration of the continuo part in broken chords.

In both main churches in Leipzig there were 'large', probably two-manual harpsichords. They were usually played by Bach himself from the scores, as evidenced by the many sketchy figures in them. In later years one of Bach's private pupils often played from a figured continuo part, a partly figured one, or a part that was not figured at all. From the parts and scores of Bach's church music it can be deduced that the general bass was probably nearly always played by organ and harpsichord simultaneously ('double accompaniment'), in all movements of the cantatas and passions. The parts of the harpsichordist and organist differed only in exceptional cases, for instance when one of them played a solo. Solo parts for harpsichord are lacking; the two surviving parts considered as such are rather elaborate accompaniments.

Rens Bijma, version 13 June 2022.

With thanks to Albert Clement, Jos van Veldhoven, Siebe Henstra, Menno van Delft, Pieter Jan Belder and Kris Verhelst-van Heyghen.

^A Johann Mattheson, *Das neu-eröffnete Orchestre*, Hamburg 1713, p. 263.

Das Clavicimbel mit seiner *Universität* gibt ein accompagnirendes / fast unentbehrliches Fundament zu Kirchen- Theatral- und Cammer-Music ab / und ist recht Wunder / daß man hiesiges Ortes die schnarrenden höchst eckelhaften **Regalen** in den Kirchen noch beybehält / da doch die **säuselnde und lispelnde** Harmonie des Clavicymbels, wo man deren sonderlich 2. haben kan / eine weit schönere Würckung auff dem Chor hat.

Ibid., *Der vollkommene Capellmeister*, Hamburg 1739, p. 484.

§. 29. Die Regale sind hiebey nichts nutz, und wundert mich, daß man noch hie und da diese schnarrende, verdrießliche Werckzeuge braucht. The clavicimbel, stave pieces or flugelgel thun an allen Orten gute, und weit angenehmere Dienste, als jene: Wwol es aus verschiedenen Ursachen nicht schlimm seyn würde, wenn in den Kirchen saubere und hurtig-ansprechende

kleine Positiven, ohne Schnarrwerck, mit den Clavicimbeln vereinigt werden könnten, oder doch von den letztgenannten, bey starcken Chören, ein Paar vorhanden wären.

Georg Philipp Telemann, *Fast allgemeines Evangelisch-Musicalisches Liederbuch*, Hamburg 1730, p. 188.

Inzwischen hat deren grössre Zahl den Nutzen, daß sie so wohl im Chor- als Cammer-Tone, nach der Orgel und dem Clavessin, gesungen mag werden.

Gottfried Heinrich Stölzel, *Abhandlung vom Recitativo*, Gotha c. 1739, p. 122v (unpublished); taken from Ahrens 2008, p. 122.

Wenn diese Art des Recitativs [=secco] unsers Erachtens in der Kirche, wo man die Orgel dazu spielen lassen muß, gute Diensten thun soll, so laße man überdieses, daß man nur vierthelweise anschlagen läßt und die benöthigten Pausen dazwischen setzet, den Bass an sich selber nicht über eine Tackt auf einer Note stille liegen. Denn ein allzulanges Stilleschweigen des Fundaments, da indeßen sich doch die Harmonie öfters verändert, ist den Ohren verdrießlich. Ein anders ist es, wenn ein Clavecin das Accompagnement führet, denn dieses kann durch sein Harpeggio sothanen Mangel reichlich ersetzen, welches aber die summende Orgel nicht thun kann. Wie denn auch mit der Orgel die allzujähen und weiten Veränderungen und Verwechslungen der Harmonie nicht so gut heraus kommen, als mit dem Clavecin. Es wäre denn daß Instrumente dazu accompagnirten, welche allen Mangel ersetzen, und dem Gehör überall Satisfaction geben.

^B Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, *Versuch über die wahre Art das Clavier zu spielen*, Zweyter Theil, Berlin 1762, p. 1f.

§. 3. Die **Orgel** ist bey Kirchensachen, wegen der Fugen, starken Chöre, und überhaupt der Bindung wegen unentbehrlich. Sie befördert die Pracht und erhält die Ordnung.

§. 4. So bald aber in der Kirche Recitative und Arien, besonders solche, wo die Mittelstimmen der Singstimme, durch ein simpel Accompagnement, alle Freyheit zum Verändern lassen, mit vorkommen, so muss ein **Flügel** dabey sein. Man hört leyder mehr als zu oft, wie kahl in diesem Falle die Ausführung ohne Begleitung des Flügels ausfällt. [...]

§. 7. Man kann also ohne Begleitung eines Clavierinstruments kein Stück gut aufführen. [...]

^C Johann Samuel Petri, *Anleitung zur praktischen Musik*, Lauban 1767, p. 42.

b) Der Clavicembalist (wenn einer da ist) accompagnire, un besonders beym *piano* so kurz, als möglich und ziehe die Finger gleich von den Accorden ab. In recitatives, he can use the *arpeggiens* or the zergliederten und gebrochenen Accorde mit gutem Erfolge sich bedienen. Triller darf er gar nicht machen mit der rechten Hand, denn er soll keine Melodie spielen.

^D Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, letter to Johann Nikolaus Forkel, 1774, *BD III*, no. 801, p. 285.

Er hörte die geringste falsche Note bey der stärcksten Besetzung. Als der größte Kenner u. Beurtheiler der Harmonie spielte er am liebsten die Bratsche mit angepaßter Stärke u. Schwäche. In seiner Jugend bis zum ziemlich herannahenden Alter spielte er die Violine rein u. durchdringend u. hielt dadurch das Orchester in einer größeren Ordnung, als er mit dem Flügel hätte ausrichten können.

^E Mattheson 1739, p. 482.

§. 16. In eben dem Ausführungs-Verstande soll ein Capellmeister, nächst dem Singen, billig das Clavier spielen können, und zwar recht gründlich, weil er damit bey der Vollziehung alles andre am besten begleiten, und auch zugleich regieren kann. Ich bin allzeit besser dabey gefahren, wenn ich sowol mitgespielt, als mitgesungen habe, als wenn ich bloß des Tacts wegen nur da gestanden bin. Der Chor wird durch solches mitspielen und Mitsingen sehr ermuntert, und man kan die Leute viel besser anfrischen.

^F Mattheson 1713, p. 263.

Das Clavicimbel mit seiner *Universitè* gibt ein accompagnirendes / fast unentbehrliches Fundament zu Kirchen- Theatral- und Cammer-Music ab / und ist recht Wunder / daß man hiesiges Ortes die schnarrenden höchst eckelhaften **Regalen** in den Kirchen noch beybehält / da doch die **säuselnde und lispelnde** Harmonie des Clavicymbels, wo man deren sonderlich 2. haben kan / eine weit schönere Würckung auff dem Chor hat.

^G Christian Carl Rolle, "Der Orgeln Behandlung bey den Kirchenmusiken", *Neue Wahrnehmungen zur Aufnahme und weiteren Ausbreitung der Music*, Berlin 1784, p. 56.

Den Flügel bey der Kirchenmusik einzuführen wird zwar sehr angerathen. Da aber bey der Theatralmusik der Schall heraufgeheth: bey der Kirchenmusik hingegen der Schall von dem Orgelchore herunterkommen muß, so gibt das Mitspiel des Flügels wohl keine sonderliche nachdrückliche Unterstützung.

^H Mattheson 1739, p. 104.

§ 35 [...] Bey Chören von mehr als 50 Personen kan ieder Accord, in einer dreitausend Mannfähigen Kirche vernommen werden; wenn eine tüchtige Faust auf den Flügel kömmt. Das hat man erfahren.

C.P.E. Bach 1762, p. 2.

§. 7. [...] Auch bey den stärksten Musiken, in Opern, sogar unter freyem Himmel, wo man gewiß glauben solte, nicht das geringste vom Flügel zu hören, vermißt man ihn, wenn er wegbleibt. Hört man in der Höhe zu, so kann man jeden Ton desselben deutlich vernehmen. Ich spreche aus der Erfahrung, und jedermann kann es versuchen.

^I Georg Falck, *Idea bonis cantoris*, Nürnberg 1688, p. 205.

Clavicymbalo oder *Gravecymbalum* ist ein Chormässig-länglicht / einem Flügel gleich *formirtes Instrument*, dergleichen mit drey Registern und Zügen gefunden werden.

^J Johann Kuhnau, *An E. Hoch Edlen und Hochweisen Rath zu Leipzigunterdienstliches Memoraiial. Erinnerung des Cantoris die Schul und Kirchen Music betreffend*, 1709, published in Spitta II, p. 856ff.

7. Wäre zu wünschen, daß man zur Unterhaltung derer in beyden Kirchen befindlichen großen *Clavicimbeln*, dazu auff's allerwenigste ein jährliches *Interesse* von 300 Thalern gehörte (denn, im Fall man sie brauchen wil, müßen sie bey jeder *Music* auff's neüe *accomodiret* seyn, und im izigen Stande dürften sie unter 6 biß 7 Thalern kaum wieder angerichtet werden) ein Mittel ausfinden könte. [...]

^K Johann Joachim Quantz, *Versuch einer Anweisung die Flöte traversiere zu spielen*, Berlin 1752, p. 184.

Die Theorbe findet hinter dem zweyten *Clavicymbal*, und den ihm zugeordneten *Violoncellisten*, bequemen Platz.

^L Christoph Ernst Sicul: *Das Thränende Leipzig*, 1727, *BD II*, 232, p. 175.

[...] die Trauer-Music, so dießmal der Herr Capellmeister, Johann Sebastian Bach, nach Italiänischer Art *compo | niret* hatte, mit *Clave di Cembalo*, welches Herr Bach selbst spielete, Orgel, *Violes di Gamba*, Lauten, Violinen, *Fleutes douces* und *Fleutes traverses &c.* und zwar die Helffte davon vor- die andere Helffte aber nach der Lob- und Trauer-Rede hören.

^M Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, letter to Johann Nikolaus Forkel, 1774, *BD III*, no. 801, p. 285.

Er hörte die geringste falsche Note bey der stärcksten Besetzung. Als der größte Kenner u. Beurtheiler der Harmonie spielte er am liebsten die Bratsche mit angepaßter Stärcke u. Schwäche. In seiner Jugend bis zum ziemlich herannahenden Alter spielte er die Violine rein u. durchdringend u. hielt dadurch das Orchester in einer größeren Ordnung, als er mit dem Flügel hätte ausrichten können.

^N Council Actuary Johann Zacharias Trefurth, Aktennotiz, 1724, *BD II*, no. 179, p. 140.

Hic

Er wollte solchem nachkommen, erinnert aber dabey, daß [...] der *Clav-Cymbel* etwas *repariret* werden müste, welches iedoch alles mit leichten Kosten zuwercke zu gericht wäre, bittet allenfalls [...] das *Clav-Cymbel repariren* zulaßen.

Senatus

Es sollte der Herr *Cantor* auf EE. Hochweisen Rath's Kosten, [...] den *Clav-Cymbel repariren* laßen.

^O Johann Sebastian Bach, Zeugnis für Friedrich Gottlieb Wild, 1727, *BD I*, no. 57, p. 127.

[...] daß wohlgedachter [Herr] *Mons*: Wild in die vier Jahre so er auf hiesiger *Vniversitaet* gelebet, [...] daß er nicht allein Unsere Kirchen *Music* durch seine wohlerlernte *Flaute-traversiere*

und Clavecin zieren helffen, sondern auch sich bey mir gar *speciell* in Clavier, General-Bass [...] informiren laßen [...].

^p Letter from Johann Friedrich Agricola to Georg Philipp Telemann, Berlin 1752, *BD III*, no. 652, p. 21 and confirmation by Marpurg, *BD III*, no. 662, p. 76.

[Agricola writes that Telemann taught him to love church music through his cantatas. He says that he accompanied Telemann's cantatas on harpsichord under the direction of Bach in Leipzig:]

[...] wenn nicht Ihre Kirchen- und Instrumentalestücke, deren ich damals eine große Menge gehört, und auf dem Flügel begleitet habe [...]

[Marpurg on Agricola with Bach in Leipzig, 1738-1741]

Er hatte dabey Gelegenheit, unter seines Lehrers Anführung, bei der Kirchenmusik, und auch eine Zeitlang im Collegio musico, daß Erlernete immer auszuüben. Hierauf unterrichtete ihn gedachter Herr Capellmeister Bach auch in der harmonischen Setzkunst, mit der ihm eigenen Gründlichkeit und Aufrichtigkeit.

^q Johann Christian Kittel, *Der angehende praktische Organist*, Dritte Abteilung, Erfurt 1808, p. 33; *BD VI*, E16.

Wenn Seb. Bach eine Kirchenmusik aufführte, so mußte allemal einer von seinen fähigsten Schülern auf dem Flügel accompagniren. Man kann wohl vermuthen, daß man sich da mit einer magern Generalbaßbegleitung ohnehin nicht vor wagen durfte. Demohnerachtet mußte man sich immer darauf gefaßt halten, daß sich oft plötzlich Bachs Hände und Finger unter die Hände und Finger des Spielers mischten und, ohne diesen weiter zu geniren, das Accompagnement mit Massen von Harmonien ausstaffirten, die noch mehr imponirten, als die unvermuthete nahe Gegenwart des strengen Lehrers.

^r Johann Matthias Gesner, (rector *Thomasschule*), Footnote to Gesner's translation of Quintilianus, p. 61, Göttingen 1738; original Latin text: see *BD II*, no. 432, p. 331f.

Translation by Gottlob Friedrich Rothe, sexton of the Thomaskirche, 1792, *BD V*, no. C978b, p. 257f.

Bey der Gelegenheit, wo Quintilian von der Geschicklichkeit und Kunst der alten Citherspieler spricht und sie bewundert, sagt Gesner in der Anmerkung:

Du würdest, Fabius, das für ganz unbedeutend halten, wenn du, aus dem Grabe erweckt, das Glück hättest, Bachen, (um den vorzüglich zu nennen, weil er vor nicht gar langer Zeit mein College auf der Thomasschule in Leipzig war) zu sehen, wie er mit beyden Händen und allen Fingern [...] unser Clavecin tractiret, das gar viele Cithern allein in sich faßt, [...] ich sage, wenn du den Mann sehen solltest, wie er, indem er das leistet, was ein ganzer Trupp eurer Citharnötgen, [...] nicht, wie der Citherspieler, etwan nur auf ein einziges Stück und dessen Vortrag seine Gedanken richtet, sondern wie derselbe auf das ganze Orchester die genaueste Aufmerksamkeit hat, und unter 30, auch 40. Musikern, den durch ein Nicken, den andern durch ein Fußstampfen, den dritten durch ein drohenden Wink mit dem Finger, wieder auf die Mensur und in den Takt bringt - dem in Discant, einem andern im Bass, dem dritten im Alt den Ton angiebt, den er singen soll, und wie so gar ein einziger Mann, bey dem größten Lärm des Musikchors, wo er unter allen die schwerste Rolle hat, dennoch so gleich es wegbringt, wenn etwas wider die Harmonie ist, und wo es steckt, wie er das ganze Chor in Ordnung erhält und überall forthat, auch so es irgendwo hinkt, ganz allein bey allen Arten des Takts, die Harmonie wieder in den Gang bringt - wie er allein, durch sein scharfes Ohr, mit einem Ton, der aus so enger Kehle kömmt, die Stimmen aller nachgebend macht.