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Laurence Dreyfus. *Bach's Continuo Group: Players and Practices in His Vocal Works*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987. Studies in the History of Music, No. 3. xii, 264 p.¹

Laurence Dreyfus offers us a first-rate study with important implications for the performance of the large vocal works of J.S. Bach. An expanded version of the author's doctoral dissertation, *Basso Continuo Performance in the Vocal Works of J.S. Bach: a Study of the Original Performance Parts* (Columbia University, 1980), the book authoritatively explores questions of continuo instrumentation and recitative accompaniment; it also details how Bach's practice may have changed during the various stages of his career. Dreyfus convincingly argues for the participation of the harpsichord as a "regular alternative to organ continuo in Bach's sacred works at Leipzig" (p. 68). He also makes a strong case for the adoption almost without exception of "shortened accompaniment" in the plain recitatives; this performance convention, he concludes guardedly, was "a standard norm of performance in important German centers" for most of the 18th century (p. 88-89).

The monograph is highly successful within its self-imposed limitations. Dreyfus has focused on "questions that could be addressed directly by a study of musical sources" (p. 5). The sources treated are the original manuscript vocal and instrumental parts of Bach's own compositions and of other works performed under his direction. Many of these parts are in Bach's hand; much of the figuring is also autograph. Quotations from treatises and lexica of the period provide additional perspective. Unfortunately, like most scholars of Baroque performance practice, Dreyfus has not scrutinized the continuo figuring closely for evidence on specific aspects of the realization, an approach which I have emphasized in my own recent book.² The appendices of Dreyfus's book, however, are an invaluable source of information regarding the extent of figuring in the original parts and also indicate which movements contain autograph figuring. Other aspects of Bach's thoroughbass notation might have been clarified for modern performers: e.g., the execution of *bassetti*, the use of horizontal lines especially over rests and long sustained notes, *tasto solo* vs. *all'ottava* realizations. Also, musical sources outside the Bach circle might have clarified certain aspects of the discussion; this is

¹Currently available only in paperback.

²*Continuo Realization in Handel's Vocal Music* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1989).

demonstrably true for G. P. Telemann's directives on recitative accompaniment.

The second chapter, devoted to the use of keyboard instruments, does exhibit some questionable assumptions. According to Dreyfus, the presence of autograph dynamics in a *Cammerton* continuo part prepared by a copyist necessarily demonstrates that the part was intended for cello or violone as well as harpsichord (p. 35), since the latter could not execute dynamic contrasts. (These marks are not contained in a scribal organ part, which was copied earlier.) But the harpsichordist could easily approximate the written dynamics by adding or subtracting voices in the realization, and simple piano-forte effects could be performed on a two-manual instrument. Similarly, Dreyfus assumes that a *tasto solo* marking in a part reveals that it was intended for keyboard (p. 44). In both cases, the markings could have been included for the sake of completeness, to give the bass parts the widest possible future utility.

Dreyfus follows Alfred Mendel's hypothesis that Bach often figured continuo parts from memory, i.e., without reference to the full score. (pp. 54, 232) However, of the examples cited to demonstrate this (NBA, II/4, Kritischer Bericht, p. 183), only one is at all convincing. Most involve momentary clashes between continuo chords and upper parts, which are less problematic in performance if a harpsichord is accompanying. These clashes might be intentional, to be sure, resulting from Bach's refusal to soften the strong harmonic implications of the bass line. Also, Mendel's hypothesis begs several questions relating to the original function and proper interpretation of the figuring. Dreyfus alludes to Bach's "commonly audacious harmonizations" of chorales (p. 54); why not similarly audacious juxtapositions of figured harmony and written parts? These minor criticisms in no way affect the progression of Dreyfus's argument nor the validity of his conclusions.

More serious reservations could be voiced regarding the chapter on recitative accompaniment. The interpretation of Heinichen's directives, which sanction both shortened and tenuto chords, seems particularly forced; Dreyfus attempts to explain his treatment of the latter as a mere pedagogical tool. As I have stated elsewhere,³ Dreyfus has probably misread Telemann's recommendations; one portion of these has been very freely translated: "Hier bleibt der bass wieder liegen . . ." is paraphrased by Dreyfus as "Here . . . the bass remains on the keys . . ." (p. 80) Not only does the original (not given in the end-notes) lack any

³*Handel's Vocal Music*, pp. 120-22.

word which refers to the keyboard, the idiom "liegen bleiben," in modern German at least, can mean anything from "to stay in bed" to "to be forgotten." The crucial point here is whether or not Telemann meant that the bass be held in recitative accompaniments; thus, Dreyfus has doubly failed us by not faithfully transmitting the ambiguity of the original.

Dreyfus even attempts to place Quantz among the proponents of shortened accompaniment, because, in the short illustration of recitative realization from his *Versuch*, he "inadvertently realizes the left-hand chords with filled note-heads" (pp. 239-40), and puts one quarter rest in the bass staff. But only the notes under the conventionally notated bass are blackened; they are also without stems. The upper staff of Quantz's example has half-notes and quarter-notes with stems. Dreyfus has oversimplified a rather complex little example, which allows for several possible interpretations. Also, given a moderately quick tempo for this dry bit of operatic parlando style, a shortened accompaniment, with all the chords as notated by Quantz, would not be feasible. Moreover, there would hardly be time for any arpeggiation.

Dreyfus overlooks one piece of evidence which counters his preference for shortened accompaniment throughout Bach's recitative. In measure 4 of Facsimile 3-6, a recitative segment from an autograph organ part, Bach puts a small horizontal line, which normally indicates a continuation of the previous harmony, over a bass rest. There would be no reason to do this if all the continuo chords were to be shortened. In this context, it seems likely that the line directs the player to sustain the previous first inversion chord over the rest; on the following beat, where we find another rest figured "5b," the diminished fifth could be added to the chord being held. Immediately following this, the shortened accompaniment could be resumed. Although Dreyfus somewhat overstates the case for shortened accompaniment, his overall conclusion regarding its use in Germany is certainly correct.

The book offers valuable guidelines on the use of non-keyboard members of the continuo group: bassoon, viola pomposa, cello, violoncello piccolo, violone, gamba, and lute. His treatment of bowed string instruments makes for fascinating reading. The author concludes that the parts labelled violoncello piccolo should be played on the viola pomposa. It seems clear that Bach wrote the violone parts for either of three distinct types: a six-string double-bass gamba with D as the lowest string, a violone grosso with C as the lowest string, or a smaller violone with G as the lowest string. Doubling of the continuo line by these

instruments an octave lower is by no means a given; the third instrument could not even play in the 16-foot register. This is true of the Brandenburg Concertos as well as the large vocal works. The practice of having the cello double the organ continuo throughout became the norm only during the Leipzig period. Regarding the lute, Dreyfus concludes that, notwithstanding the celebrated arioso from the *Johannes-Passion*, Bach "made little use of it in his sacred vocal works" (p. 172). Hopefully performers will give serious consideration to the evidence presented here and not perpetuate current haphazard practices of continuo instrumentation.

Strange to tell, the book lacks a bibliography. The appendices do list the primary musical sources, but the second appendix is ordered by date. The book is not extensively indexed, and the cantatas are indexed by BWV number only. These are editorial decisions which render the work less serviceable for performers and non-Bach specialists. In at least one instance, the placement of footnote references combined with insufficient explanatory matter created some confusion for this reader regarding the presence of supporting documentation in extant archives (p. 25, lines 10-16).

Original language versions of quotes are given in the notes "only when a translation is problematic or when the source is not easily accessible" (p. 221). The Telemann passage mentioned above is arguably both. The musical examples, facsimiles, and illustrations are attractively presented. One example, however, is printed in two keys without explanation: a cello part in D and a simultaneous violone part in C (p. 153); only a partial elucidation is given elsewhere in the book (p. 119).

Without doubt, Professor Dreyfus has given us a highly commendable addition to Bach scholarship, extraordinarily well-written, as engaging as it is significant.

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