

Report on the Third J. S. Bach Dialogue Meeting: New Directions in Bach Studies

RUTH TATLOW

The Third Bach Dialogue Meeting of Bach Network UK was held in Oxford (Faculty of Music and Merton College) on 5 and 6 January 2008, bringing together nearly sixty participants from ten different nations. Although the common language of the meeting was English, the charming variety of accents, and the snippets of Dutch, German, Swedish and Hebrew caught at coffee times were a constant reminder of the multicultural diversity that was to enrich the discussions; surely the best way to develop new and unfettered perspectives on Bach's music. As with the second Dialogue meeting, all papers for the full sessions were available in advance giving participants the opportunity to engage with the subject matter. The title 'Dialogue' again lived up to its name, with the discussions chasing the clock at the ends of sessions and continuing across coffee breaks and mealtimes.

The Faculty of Music at Oxford University contributed greatly to the success of the event by providing the venue for sessions and coffee breaks, while the beauty of Merton College was a joy for ear and eye as we gathered in the chapel for the Musical Moment and the hall for the conference dinner. Several participants kindly made donations over and above the conference fees which enabled us both to assist the student participants and help with general expenses.

Saturday 5 January 2008

Following registration, Reinhard Strohm opened the meeting with a warm welcome to all speakers and participants. The first session, *Tracing Bach's Stylistic Developments: Sources and Styles*, then proceeded directly with a paper given by Peter Wollny, on 'The Weimar Organ Tablature: Bach's Earliest Autographs' (see pp. 67-74 above). Richard Jones followed with 'His superior ideas are the consequences of those inferior ones': Influence and Independence in Bach's Early Creative Development' (see pp. 31-38 above), a

by-product of Jones' recent book *The Creative Development of Johann Sebastian Bach*, Vol 1: 1695–1717 (Oxford, 2007). Chair and member of programme committee, Yo Tomita, requested that the Dialogue for this session should be between Wollny and Jones in the first instance before opening the issues to participants. An expert exchange between the two speakers ensued, and the public discussion continued over tea.

A luxurious eighty-minute slot was set aside for the second session, Future Direction of Bach Source Studies, when we heard Christoph Wolff present an exciting overview entitled 'Bach materials in the Berlin Sing-Akademie: a preliminary stock-taking'. We were given many eagerly-awaited answers about the holdings in the Berlin Sing-Akademie collections as well as pointers to publications. Spurred on by the lively chair, Peter Ward Jones, the question session took on a life of its own. Tantalising histories of undiscovered war trophies and the practical reality of the academic treasure hunt awakened the buccaneer-spirit in many a breast. The buzz could be felt as participants made their way to Merton College Chapel.

At the Musical Moment, introduced by Katharine Pardee (organ), participants were treated to a selection of original compositions and arrangements, opening with three songs for soprano (Catherine Jones) and organ accompaniment from the collection *Sacred Minstrelsy* (London, 1835). Next we heard an extraordinary arrangement for virtuoso double bass (Tim Amherst) and organ by D. Dragonetti (1835) Bach's Prelude and Fugue in D major (BWV 532), and finally a group of three pieces for organ by Bach and S. Wesley on the chapel organ (John Butt and Katharine Pardee). Chilled drinks were served in a similarly chilly ante-chapel before a thoroughly relaxing and enjoyable conference dinner.

Sunday 6 January 2008

The second day, Sunday 6 January, began bright and early with the Young Scholars' Forum, chaired by John Butt. Eight doctoral students had the challenging task of compressing the essentials of their research projects, including parameters, methodology and aspirations, into a mere ten minutes each. This impressive high-energy session never missed a beat. Within eighty minutes we were caught up with the excitement of the latest on Corelli and style (Alberto Sanna), Muffat and copyists of Fux's circle (Alison Dunlop), forensic document examination techniques (Martin Jarvis), coffee-house culture (Burkhard Schwalbach), new research into Bach's canons (Elise Crean), interpretation of CPE Bach's dynamic markings (Rachel Baldock), the reception of the 'Great 18' chorale preludes (Ian Mills) and Europe-wide Bach reception (Tanja Kovačević). Full texts of all papers can be read on pp. 77-110 above. At the invitation of the chair, experts in the audience addressed individual scholars suggesting ideas of inestimable value for new sources and

future avenues of exploration. We adjourned for coffee energised by youthful zeal and inspired to see these projects come to fruition.

Chair and member of programme committee Katharine Pardee opened the penultimate session, *The Reception of Bach's Works in the Nineteenth Century*, welcoming Albert Clement as he spoke on 'Performance and Reception of Bach's Matthew Passion in Berlin, 1829'. The presentation included two interesting and startlingly contrasting recordings of the opening chorus "Kommt, ihr Töchter" (BWV 244/1). Since Robin A. Leaver was unfortunately unable to be at the Dialogue, his paper 'An Early English Imprint of the 'Crucifixus' of the *B minor Mass* (BWV 232^{II}/5)' (see pp. 39-54 above) was read by Ruth Tatlow. The content of both papers generated lively public debate with many valuable contributions from specialists in the audience.

As one o'clock resounded among the spires many groups of Dialogue delegates were seen descending upon neighbouring sandwich bars, where discussions were continued, friendships consolidated and future meetings planned.

It was Reinhard Strohm who chaired the afternoon session, *Images of Bach Today*, welcoming regular Dialogue participant Ruth HaCohen to present a paper 'Nineteenth-Century Legacy Projected onto the Twenty-First: A German-Israeli Dialogue on Bach's Passions' which developed themes first raised for BNUK members in her Discussion starter in *Understanding Bach 1* (2006), 87f. A deep and animated discussion followed and all too soon it was time for the final paper. Yo Tomita had published 'Anna Magdalena as Bach's Copyist' in *Understanding Bach 2* (2007), pp. 59-76 in response to the publicity afforded to Martin Jarvis's claims that Anna Magdalena had composed rather than copied the *Cello Suites*. Since Jarvis was present and since the Dialogue meeting had just heard his description of forensic document examination techniques, Tomita used the opportunity to demonstrate the Dialogue format at its best: incisive, good humoured, uncompromising, and intellectually playful. Jarvis admitted that he felt like Galileo, on trial while still believing passionately that another explanation lay behind the calligraphic changes. Tomita responded deftly, and as the conversation turned towards the incontrovertible evidence that there were indeed women composers in the eighteenth century, the session ended with magnanimity.

Bringing the Dialogue to a formal close, Reinhard Strohm thanked all speakers, musicians and participants for a stimulating meeting. He encouraged members to become Friends of Bach Network, passed on greetings from members who had not been able to attend, and finally wished everyone a safe journey home.