

The 'Lost' Eighteen: Breitkopf, Mendelssohn and the Nineteenth-century Re-emergence of Bach's 15 *Grand Preludes* on *Corales*¹

IAN MILLS

The 'Lost' Eighteen

In 1803, *Breitkopf und Härtel* published four volumes of organ chorales by Johann Sebastian Bach.² *J. S. Bach's Choral-Vorspiele für die Orgel mit einem und zwey Klavieren und Pedal* was essentially a miscellany of thirty-six works from various periods of the composer's life: the collection contained four chorales from the *Orgelbüchlein*, all six *Schübler Chorales*, eight chorales from *Clavierübung III*, sixteen chorales found in the MS copy Am.B.72a (formerly called the Kirnberger Collection) a spurious setting of *Schmücke dich, O liebe Seele* BWV 759 and the *Canonic Variations Vom Himmel hoch, da komm' ich her* BWV 769/769a. In the context of early nineteenth-century reception, these volumes of *J. S. Bach's Choral-Vorspiele* represented a significant milestone; for the first time, organists could access a cross-section of Bach's organ repertoire which included much previously unprinted material.

These publications contained chorale preludes from four major collections of Bach's organ catalogue; however, one major anthology of organ chorales was missing from Breitkopf's assortment. The *Orgelchoräle aus der Leipziger Originalhandschrift* BWV 651–668, commonly known as the Great Eighteen chorale preludes, were unrepresented and were not to appear in print until Mendelssohn's first edition some 40 years later (and even then, only 15 of the 17 complete chorales were published).³

¹ Felix Mendelssohn's first edition of the Great Eighteen (except BWV 664, 665, 666 and 668) was thus entitled: *John Sebastian Bach's Organ Compositions on Corales Psalm Tunes* (London: Coventry & Hollier, 1846).

² See *Kritischer Bericht* to NBA IV/2 p. 53.

³ The final chorale, BWV 668, is incomplete.

These irregularities raise important questions concerning this repertoire, including:

1. Why did it take so long to publish these works, especially given the relatively uncomplicated source situation surrounding the autograph score?
2. What role did Breitkopf play in the dissemination of the Great Eighteen chorales in the late eighteenth century?
3. What do the circumstances surrounding Mendelssohn's 1846 edition of the chorales tell us about the popularity of these works at this time?

At present, my research interests are concerned with a single task: to investigate the dissemination of manuscript copies and printed editions of the Great Eighteen in the 100 years following Bach's death, in order to appreciate more fully the context of the works' reception. This process involves the study of one autograph score, eighty-four eighteenth and early nineteenth-century manuscript sources, and two printed editions.

Manuscript Copies: The Great Eighteen & Mus. ms. Bach P 271

Like Bach's other great collection of organ chorales, the *Orgelbüchlein*, the late versions of the Great Eighteen chorales are preserved in autograph; however, the relationship between this manuscript (P 271) and Mendelssohn's first edition of 1846—the journey from autograph to printed score—is far from straightforward. Some discrepancies in the musical text suggest the presence of several intermediate sources; indeed, the source situation concerning the dissemination of the chorales after 1750 is complicated by the fact that the works were not transmitted as literal copies of the autograph P 271.

There are several notable connections between Mendelssohn, Breitkopf and the autograph which deserve further research. Before turning to reception-based issues, let us first consider the provenance of two of these important secondary sources owned by Christian Friedrich Penzel and Johann Christoph Oley respectively: P 1109 and P 1160.

The Breitkopf catalogue of 1764 lists 114 of Bach's organ chorales (BWV 599–769), including thirteen of the Great Eighteen.⁴ Penzel's manuscript copy (P1109) contains eleven of the Great Eighteen and Oley's manuscript preserves seven. Another Breitkopf sale copy, GD Mus. ms. 4203/4204 (which exists in the Photo Film archive in Vienna, the original manuscript having been lost after the Second World War),⁵ preserves thirteen of the chorales. Once again, it is significant that none of these sources preserves Bach's

⁴ See Ernest May, 'Connections between Breitkopf and J. S. Bach', in George B. Stauffer (ed.), *Bach Perspectives, Volume Two. J. S. Bach, the Breitkopfs, and Eighteenth-Century Music Trade* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), p. 18.

⁵ *ibid.* p. 24.

autograph in its entirety. A third sale copy, Am.B.72a, contains the chorales BWV 691–711 which appear (in order) in Breitkopf's 1803 edition *J. S. Bach's Choral-Vorspiele für die Orgel*.

Breitkopf's only surviving house copy BruBR Ms II 3919—a manuscript made up of seven separate parts—contains fragments of the following chorales: BWV 614, 690, 694, 696–699, 701–704, 712–713 and 741. Unfortunately, research efforts have been frustrated by the absence of the Great Eighteen chorales.

Revisiting recent scholarship

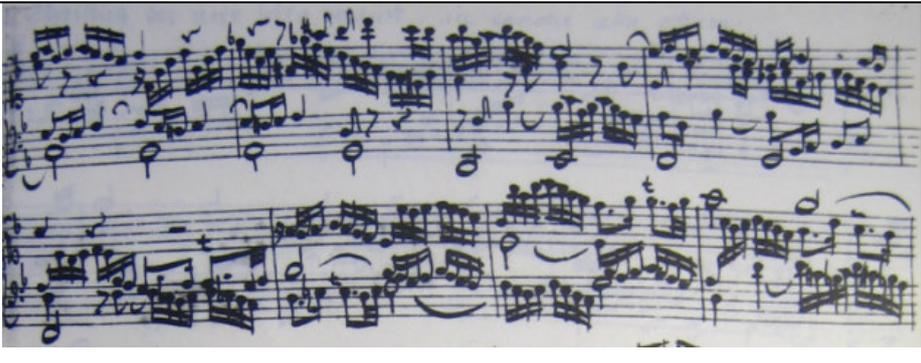
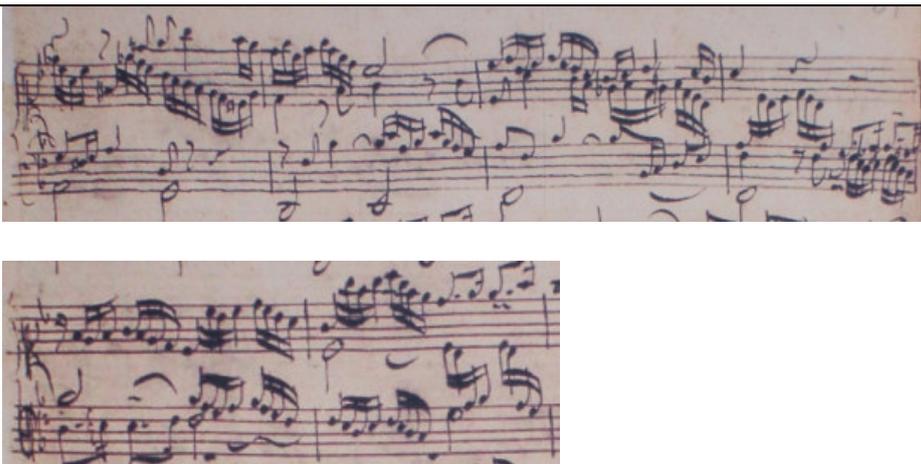
Ernest May has been working on the Bach/Breitkopf relationship for some time; recently, part of his 1974 thesis was updated and published in *Bach Perspectives*, Volume 2 (1996). Concerning the Great Eighteen autograph, he concluded, in his 1974 thesis, 'These circumstances suggest the possibility that some or all of the late copies may have been taken from a source other than the autograph P 271'.⁶

Using a text-critical approach, he notes the variant readings found between Penzel's copy from Breitkopf (P 1109), and the autograph (P 271); a total of sixteen variants. As an example, let us briefly consider the variants found in close proximity in *Komm, Heiliger Geist* BWV 651. Here, May cites the following four errors as evidence that P 1109 was copied from an intermediate source, not from P 271:

1. b. 88⁴, alto
2. b.88, pedal
3. b.90², tenor
4. b.91⁴, soprano.

Each variant has either a harmonic or rhythmic effect: for example, the pedal F in b.88 in P 271 creates more stasis than the ♭♭ (F-G) in P 1109.

⁶ See Ernest May, 'Breitkopf's Role in the Transmission of J. S. Bach's Organ Chorales' (PhD Dissertation: Princeton University, 1974), p. 88.

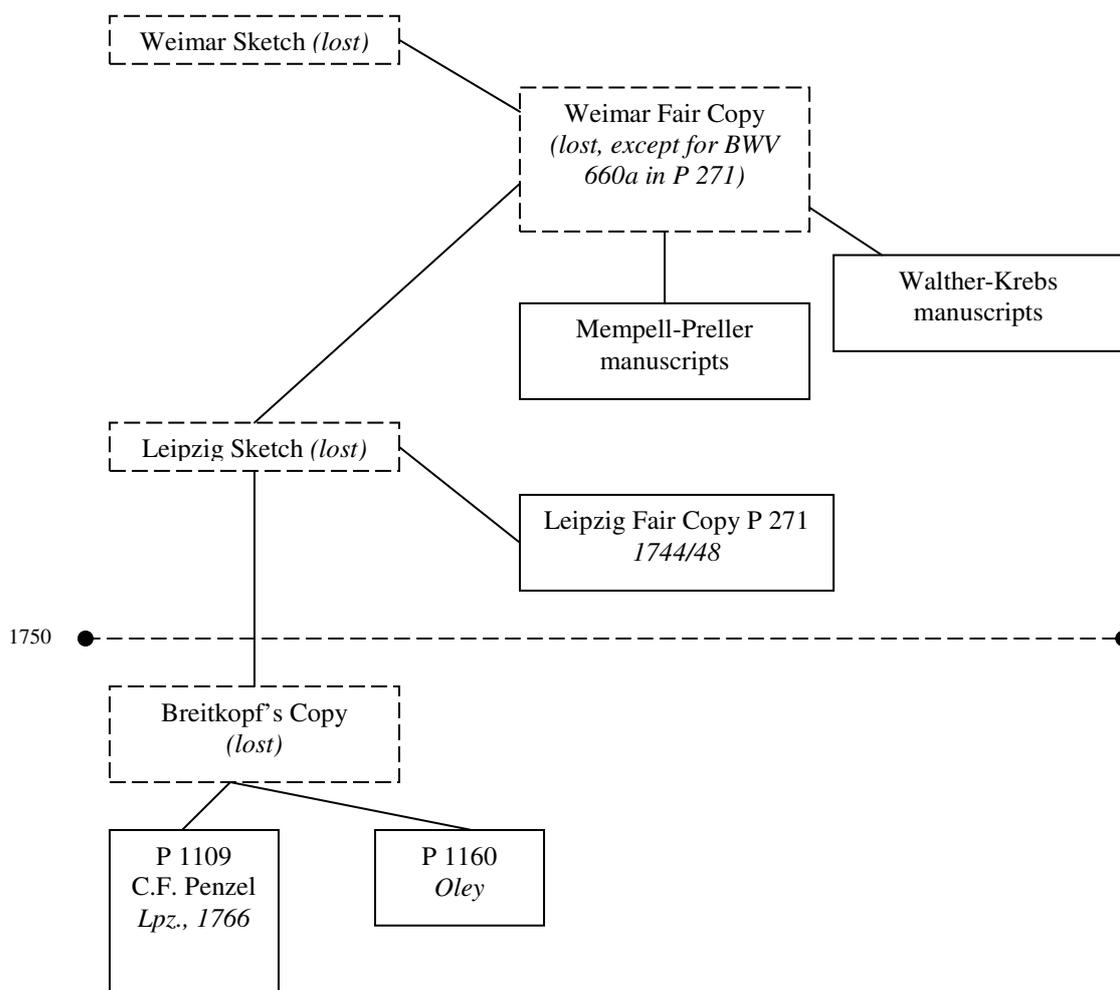
| | |
|--|---|
| <p>P 1109, Penzel</p> <p>BWV 651, bb.85-92</p> |  |
| <p>P 271, Leipzig Autograph</p> <p>BWV 651, bb. 86-91</p> |  |

Example 1

My research is concerned with re-evaluating these findings by considering the effect of each variant on performance practice; for example, according to May's hypothesis, variant 1 (b. 88⁴, alto) originates from a lost sketch written before Bach's Leipzig fair copy. If we consider rhythm at this point, the change from ♩♩♩♩ to ♩♩♩ suggests a simplification of Bach's rhythmic language. However, this is the opposite of what we might expect: in general, Bach's revision process was concerned with heightening and improving – rather than loosening – his rhythmic vocabulary. Although this is only one example of many, it suggests that May's hypothesis should be revisited in the light of recent scholarship concerning Bach's revision process.

May uses these results as the basis for the following stemma. Here, he hypothesises that both P 1109 and P 1160 were copied from Breitkopf's sketch which was, in turn, copied from the lost autograph sketch of the late versions of the Great Eighteen.⁷

⁷ *ibid.* p. 92.



Example 2

Present and future research: Mendelssohn and marketing the Eighteen

My reception-based research is concerned with the chorale prelude, and the 'demand' for the genre in the first half of the nineteenth century. The table below summarises the number of extant manuscript sources of each chorale prelude copied between 1750 and 1850, along with Bach's title (if given).

| BWV | Number of MSS | Title/indication of genre/instruction |
|-----|---------------|--|
| 651 | 30 | <i>Fantasia super Komm, Heiliger Geist</i> |
| 652 | 25 | |
| 653 | 25 | |
| 654 | 26 | |
| 655 | 30 | <i>Trio super Herr Jesu Christ, dich zu uns wend</i> |
| 656 | 20 | |
| 657 | 22 | |
| 658 | 25 | |
| 659 | 25 | |
| 660 | 28 | <i>Trio super Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland</i> |
| 661 | 28 | <i>Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland in organo pleno</i> |
| 662 | 22 | |
| 663 | 21 | |
| 664 | 30 | <i>Trio super Allein Gott in der Höh sei Ehr</i> |
| 665 | 17 | |
| 666 | 15 | sub communione |
| 667 | 16 | organo pleno |

Example 3

It can be seen that the most readily copied chorales were those which carried generic titles, namely *Trio*, *Fantasia* and the instruction *in organo pleno*. Although statistical analysis of this nature has its limitations, it does, nonetheless, provide us with a starting point for further investigation into the popularity of some of these compositions over others. Indeed, this strand of research explores the concept of the Great Eighteen as a collection, versus the idea that P 271 was—at this point in its reception—considered a collection of separate works.

This is but one example of how exploring the utility of the Great Eighteen chorales (both in the context of the church and concert hall) is key to understanding the context of their ‘re-emergence’ in the middle of the nineteenth century. Other emerging strands of research include more involved style analysis of the variants between MS sources, and the use of the Great Eighteen in a pedagogical context. Exploring the contrasting usage of the collection in the hundred years following Bach’s death allows us to appreciate more fully how these works became engrained in the organist’s canon.