

The Fourteen Canons (BWV 1087): Foundation or Culmination? A re-evaluation of their position among Bach's late works

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Many of Johann Sebastian Bach's late works are characterised by their monothematicism and use of canon. The discovery of the *Fourteen Canons* (BWV 1087) on the inner side of the back cover of his own copy (hereafter referred to as the *Handexemplar*) of the *Goldberg Variations* (BWV 988) made Bach's fascination with these aspects even more apparent. Numerous scholars have commented on the position of the *Fourteen Canons* in relation to the *Goldberg Variations*, the *Canonic Variations on 'Vom Himmel hoch'* (BWV 769) and the *Musical Offering* (BWV 1079), and have consistently interpreted them as in some way forming the foundation for the writing of these more extensive works. In this article, however, I will suggest that the *Fourteen Canons* should be viewed as the culmination of Bach's engagement with strict counterpoint.¹

Broadly speaking, two different compositional scenarios have been proposed. In the first article to be published on the *Fourteen Canons*, Olivier Alain cautiously suggested that they were developed between c. 1740–1742 as a 'preliminary study of the canonic resources of the bass theme' of the *Goldberg Variations*.² Conversely, Christoph Wolff concluded that they were composed between c. 1742–1746, and consequently identifies an evolution amongst Bach's late works in which the *Fourteen Canons* are viewed as the 'logical connecting link . . . between the free virtuoso canonic style of the *Goldberg Variations*, and the more subtle and difficult technique of the *Musical Offering* of 1747 and the variations on *Vom Himmel hoch* of the same year'.³ The latter view has substantially influenced subsequent interpretations; similar sentiments regarding the chronology and role of the

¹ This represents a change from the position expressed in Elise Crean, 'G. H. Stölzel's *Practischer Beweis*: A Hitherto Unconsidered Source for J. S. Bach's *Fourteen Canons*', *Bach* 40/2 (2009), 1–21.

² 'Une première étude des ressources canoniques de la basse du thème'. Oliver Alain, 'Un supplément inédit aux Variations Goldberg de J. S. Bach', *Revue de Musicologie* 61/2 (1975), 249.

³ Johann Sebastian Bach, *Vierzehn Kanons über die ersten acht Fundamentalnoten der Aria aus den 'Goldberg-Variationen'*, ed. Christoph Wolff (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1976), p. 5.

Fourteen Canons were expounded by Nicholas Kenyon,⁴ while Randolph Currie, although suggesting that they were written in 1747 before Bach became a member of the Corresponding Society of Musical Sciences,⁵ refers to Wolff's 'cogent remarks on the role of this set of canons in Bach's evolving canonic style'.⁶

To a large extent, Wolff's theory rests upon his dating of the autograph copy to between c. 1742–1746.⁷ Although the *terminus post quem* was naturally established by the publication date of the *Goldberg Variations*,⁸ the *terminus ante quem* is based on the assumption that the *Fourteen Canons* must have been completed by this time because Bach would simply have selected No. 13 from the set to hold in the Elias Gottlieb Haußmann portrait; the subtle metrical, rhythmic and harmonic alterations in the version depicted here, and also in the print which Bach submitted to the Corresponding Society of Musical Sciences in June 1747,⁹ represent later revisions.¹⁰ However, Kobayashi's revised dating of the manuscript to between c. 1747–August 1748¹¹ indicates that the *Canon triplex à 6*

⁴ Nicholas Kenyon, 'A Newly Discovered Group of Canons by Bach', *Musical Times* 117/1599 (1976), 391–93.

⁵ Having suggested that Bach 'had Mizler's Society in mind when he wrote the various canons of BWV 1087' and intended to submit them upon his admission as a member in June 1747, Currie writes that 'such an assumption would tend to suggest that the canons were composed in the months just prior to that date'. Randolph N. Currie, 'Bach's Newly Discovered Canons in a First Edition: Some Observations', *Bach* 8/2 (1977), 5.

⁶ Randolph N. Currie, 'Bach's Newly Discovered Canons in a First Edition: Some Observations' *Bach* 8/3 (1977), 6.

⁷ Alain similarly concluded that the canons were entered into the print during this time; he leaves the question open as to whether Bach finalised the systematic organisation before 1742 or if he subsequently made alterations to their arrangement as he made the autograph copy. Alain, 'Un supplément inédit aux Variations Goldberg de J. S. Bach', 249–50.

⁸ More recently, Gregory Butler has shown that the *Goldberg Variations* were published in 1741. Gregory Butler, 'Neues zur Datierung der Goldberg-Variationen', *Bach-Jahrbuch* 74 (1988), 219–23. In *NBA v/2 Kritischer Bericht* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1981), Wolff mentions that the *Fourteen Canons* could have been written before the *Goldberg Variations* because the final version that was copied into the *Handexemplar* would necessarily have been preceded by earlier drafts but he concludes that it is more likely they were composed afterwards (p. 121) and does not mention any such alternative scenario in his article 'Bach's Handexemplar of the *Goldberg Variations*', *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 29/2 (1976), 224–41.

⁹ Yoshitake Kobayashi has suggested that Bach was actually holding the print of the *Canon triplex à 6 Voc* (rather than the autograph) in the portrait. Yoshitake Kobayashi, 'Zur Chronologie der Spätwerke Johann Sebastian Bachs. Kompositions- und Aufführungstätigkeit von 1736 bis 1750', *Bach-Jahrbuch* 74 (1988), 55. Elsewhere, he speculates that it was not originally printed for Bach's joining of the Corresponding Society of Musical Sciences. Instead, it was produced for a different purpose, namely to demonstrate his personal admiration for and to pay tribute to Johann Caspar Ferdinand Fischer who died on 27 August 1746 because Bach incorporated a canon on the theme from the E major fugue of Fischer's *Ariadne Musica*, a subject he had also used in the E major fugue of *The Well Tempered Clavier, Book II* (BWV 878/2). I am most grateful to Nobuaki Ebata for making me aware of Kobayashi's theory and to Yo Tomita for subsequently translating the relevant passages from his book *Bach: Densho no nazo o ou* (Tokyo: Shunju sha, 1995), pp. 259–60.

¹⁰ The differences between No. 11 and the version which was presented to Johann Gottfried Fulde on 15 October 1747 (BWV 1077) are similarly explained.

¹¹ Kobayashi, 'Zur Chronologie der Spätwerke Johann Sebastian Bachs', 60.

Voc (BWV 1076), the slight variant of which also occurs in BWV 1087, did not stem directly from Bach's *Handexemplar*.

There appear to be two possible explanations. The *Canon triplex à 6 Voc* could have been revised as Bach copied it from another (now lost) manuscript; when he later used this source, perhaps an early draft, as the basis for the version in the *Handexemplar*, he did not incorporate the previous alterations.¹² Alternatively, Nobuaki Ebata contends that the composition of the *Canon triplex à 6 Voc* actually preceded that of the *Fourteen Canons*. Based on Kobayashi's research regarding the origins of the *Canon triplex à 6 Voc*,¹³ Ebata has hypothesised that this work was initially conceived on its own. The starting point for its composition was the theme by Fischer, which necessarily guided the incorporation of the eight note ground bass¹⁴ and from which the idea of writing a set of canons on this particular subject emerged.¹⁵ Accordingly, at some stage between holding the *Canon triplex à 6 Voc* in the Haußmann portrait of 1746 and presenting the dedication canon BWV 1077 to Johann Gottfried Fulde on 15 October 1747, Bach formulated an early draft of the *Fourteen Canons* and then, during the closing months of 1747 or by August 1748, produced the autograph fair copy in the *Handexemplar*.¹⁶ Although Ebata's theory is mere speculation, it challenges another assumption, namely that the *Fourteen Canons* must have existed in some form by 1746.

Without the discovery of new sources it is obviously not possible to ascertain exactly when the *Fourteen Canons* were composed but at the very least, Kobayashi's revised dating indicates that Bach's interest in and engagement with these miniature essays in strict counterpoint is much later than has generally been accepted.¹⁷ Moreover, if Ebata's chronological outline is correct, the implications are far reaching, as by extension it opens up the prospect that the *Fourteen Canons*

¹² This would equally account for the differences in BWV 1077.

¹³ See note 9.

¹⁴ It may be significant that there is a source in the hand of Johann Philipp Kirnberger which indicates that this subject was not exclusively associated with the *Fourteen Canons*. Under the title 'Joh: Seb: Bachs Aria mit 30. Veränderung. über', Kirnberger has notated the eight note ground bass in crotchets with repeat signs, albeit commencing on the final note G and correspondingly ending on the penultimate note d. Kirnberger may have noted this excerpt during his time as a pupil of Bach's in Leipzig between 1739 and 1741. Reproduced in *NBA v/2 KB*, pp. 96 and 155.

¹⁵ Ebata also believes that it is more logical in terms of compositional process to consider that Bach wrote the most complex canon first.

¹⁶ I would like to express my gratitude to Nobuaki Ebata for communicating his unpublished hypothesis to me during a visit to Queen's University Belfast in November 2009.

¹⁷ In fact, there is an intriguing anomaly within the autograph which suggests that the manuscript from which Bach made the fair copy could have contained several differences. The layout of the staves suggests that Bach had a definite plan in mind as he ruled out the autograph because they are arranged in groups of either single, double or triple systems that are clearly separated by larger spaces; more specifically, there are sixteen staves which are divided into groups of 2 x 1, 2 x 2, 3 x 3 and 1 x 1, and therefore correspond exactly, with the exception of Nos. 9 and 10, with the number of notated voices in each canon. While the possibility cannot be dismissed that Bach simply made a mistake as he ruled and created a system of three staves rather than of two staves followed by a further single staff, it should be considered that he may have altered the content of the *Fourteen Canons* at this time.

did not follow the *Goldberg Variations* directly but were composed after both the *Canonic Variations* and the *Musical Offering*. This contradicts the prevalent view regarding the progression between these works; although Wolff reaches a natural and logical conclusion based on his chronology, the following reassessment of the various levels of relationship that exist between the late works reveals a different picture.

There are several obvious connections between the *Goldberg Variations* and the *Fourteen Canons*. In addition to their position at the back of the *Handexemplar* of the *Goldberg Variations*, the *Fourteen Canons* have a title that links them both implicitly and explicitly to the preceding work; the appellation *Verschiedene Canones* is evidently similar to *Aria mit verschiedenen Veränderungen*, while the remainder of the name, *über die ersteren acht Fundamental-Noten vorheriger Arie*, highlights their thematic relationship. Although Wolff views the *Fourteen Canons* as a logical development of the *Goldberg Variations*,¹⁸ it should be considered that the title *Verschiedene Canones über die ersteren acht Fundamental-Noten vorheriger Arie* may not actually be related to the genesis of the work but rather may simply follow a generic pattern in which canons were identified on a descriptive basis according to their thematic material, as also occurred in the *Musical Offering* with the *Canones diversi super Thema Regium*.¹⁹ Indeed, this subject was not exclusive to the *Goldberg Variations* but was instead a popular bass line set by numerous composers, including Johann Christoph Bach, Georg Frideric Handel, Gottlieb Muffatt and Henry Purcell.²⁰

Wolff also argued that the *Fourteen Canons* acted as a stimulus for the composition of the *Canonic Variations*, largely because of the thematic similarities between the ground bass and both the first and last lines of the chorale melody *Vom Himmel hoch da komm ich her*.²¹ It should be remembered that Bach had used

¹⁸ 'He [Bach] had written thirty variations on the aria ground of unusual length, thereby virtually exhausting the material. But his high standards obviously demanded that he elaborate the ground even further, this time restricting himself to just the first eight notes of the ground and composing on an entirely different contrapuntal level as well'. Wolff, 'Bach's Handexemplar of the *Goldberg Variations*', 239.

¹⁹ In terms of individual canons, titles were also descriptive and characteristically referred to particular aspects of the composition such as the number of voices, the techniques used or the interval of imitation.

²⁰ For a discussion of this issue, see Fritz Müller, 'Das Urbild des Baßthemas von Joh. Seb. Bachs "Aria mit 30 Veränderungen"', *Zeitschrift für Musik* 104/11 (1937), 1228–30 and Peter Elster, 'Anmerkungen zur Aria der sogenannten Goldberg-Variationen BWV 988 – Bachs Bearbeitung eines französischen Menuetts', in *Bach-Händel-Schütz-Ehrung 1985 der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik. Bericht über die Wissenschaftliche Konferenz zum V. Internationalen Bachfest der DDR in Verbindung mit dem 60. Bachfest der Neuen Bachgesellschaft. Leipzig, 25. bis 27. März 1985*, eds. Winfried Hoffmann and Armin Schneiderheinze (Leipzig: VEB Deutscher Verlag für Musik, 1988), pp. 259–67. In response to Robert Marshall's argument that the *Goldberg Variations* demonstrate Bach's stylistic progressiveness, Friedrich Neumann actually goes so far as to suggest that the aria itself was not written by Bach but by an unknown French composer. See Robert Marshall, 'Bach the Progressive: Observations on His Later Works', *Musical Quarterly* 62/3 (1976), 313–57 and Friedrich Neumann, 'Bach: Progressive or Conservative and the Authorship of the Goldberg Aria', *Musical Quarterly* 71/3 (1985), 281–94.

²¹ Wolff, 'Bach's Handexemplar of the *Goldberg Variations*', 240. Jerome Horowitz reckoned that the 'canonic treatment of *Vom Himmel hoch* may well have suggested itself to him in his

this chorale melody in various compositions, such as the organ preludes BWV 738 and BWV 606, the E flat major *Magnificat* (BWV 243a) and the *Christmas Oratorio* (BWV 248). It seems reasonable to assume that the contrapuntal mind of the composer would have recognised the canonic potential of *Vom Himmel hoch* prior to writing either the *Goldberg Variations* or the *Fourteen Canons*. Indeed, Bach was specifically engaged with this thematic material at the beginning of the 1740s, revising an early chorale prelude (BWV 700) and composing a fughetto for manuals (BWV 701), which may well have influenced his decision to set it subsequently in strict counterpoint.²²

The *Canonic Variations* can be seen as constituting a natural development from the *Goldberg Variations*. At a general level, Bach's interest in writing canons on a wide range of intervals is again manifest; the *Goldberg Variations* use all intervals within (and slightly beyond) the octave, while the *Canonic Variations* draw on all intervals apart from the unison and fourth, and likewise include a canon at the ninth. More specifically, in the autograph of the *Canonic Variations*,²³ the intervallic content of the canons correspondingly guided the organisation of the movements. In the *Goldberg Variations* the canons occur on every third variation and are systematically arranged according to an ascending step-wise series of intervals so that the third variation is a canon at the unison, the sixth is a canon at the second, the ninth a canon at the third and so on until the twenty-seventh variation which features a canon at the ninth. In the *Canonic Variations*, a different, perhaps even more advanced, ordering principle is employed, with Bach manipulating the consonant and dissonant intervals to create an almost symmetrical pattern; the opening two movements and the first half of the third consistently use consonant intervals of imitation with canons occurring at the octave in Variation I, at the fifth in Variation II and at both the sixth and third in Variation V, whereas the remainder of the composition, excluding Variation IV which returns to the consonant interval of an octave, presents canons at dissonant intervals with imitation at the second and ninth in the second half of Variation V followed by a canon at the seventh in Variation III.

Regardless of the thematic connection to the *Goldberg Variations* and the thematic resemblance to the *Canonic Variations*, the *Fourteen Canons* display the closest similarities in terms of actual type and character with the canons of the *Musical Offering*. The previous chronological placement of the *Fourteen Canons* ensured that they would be viewed as a precursor to the canons of the *Musical Offering*. However, a comparative examination of the two works in combination with a refined understanding of the stages involved in the production of the

absorption with the Goldberg ground bass, its variants, and canonic procedures'. Jerome Horowitz, 'Bach's Canonic Variations on *Vom Himmel hoch* as an Extension of the Goldberg Variations', *Diapason* 85/10 (1994), 11.

²² Incidentally, the second movement of Bach's *Prelude, Fugue and Allegro for Lute* (BWV 998), which was written sometime between 1734 and 1747, uses a subject similar to the opening line of the chorale melody. Anne Leahy, 'Bach's Prelude, Fugue and Allegro for Lute (BWV 998): A Trinitarian Statement of Faith?', *Journal of the Society for Musicology in Ireland* 1 (2005), 33–51.

²³ In the autograph the variations are ordered I – II – V – III – IV as opposed to the arrangement of I – II – III – IV – V found in the print.

Musical Offering and the insight that this offers into the evolving concept of its canons enables us to appreciate the true position of the *Fourteen Canons*.

Although the *Fourteen Canons* have a comparatively simple subject, and consequently are much smaller than the canons of the *Musical Offering*, they encompass an almost encyclopaedic range of canonic techniques and types, are characterised by greater cohesiveness as a set and display a more sophisticated organisational scheme. Within a single page, Bach includes examples of single, double, triple and *cantus firmus* canons, and uses the four different types of melodic movement i.e. similar motion, contrary motion, retrograde and retrograde inversion, as well as both augmentation and diminution. Grouped together under a single title and numbered from one to fourteen, they are arranged according to an overall principle of increasing complexity in terms of the number of voices, thematic content, contrapuntal devices employed and concentration of the canonic writing. The opening four canons are remarkably simple, consisting of two parts that present only the subject, treating it by inversion, retrograde and retrograde inversion. Their inclusion is perhaps somewhat surprising, given the habitual complexity of Bach's writing. However, such is the all-encompassing nature and design of the work that Bach, not content to explore an array of specific techniques and types, also wished to demonstrate the different levels of difficulty possible within canonic composition. The second group of canons is characterised by a three-part texture, in which the subject is presented as a *cantus firmus* against two other voices in canon, and the introduction of new melodic material. Some of the canons are clearly based on the subject itself (Nos. 7 and 8 incorporate diminished variants) while others consist largely of independent material (Nos. 6 and 9). In the final group, Bach includes canons with four, five and six voices. Nos. 11 and 12 constitute a development from the preceding *cantus firmus* canons with double rather than single canons stated above the subject. Furthermore, No. 12 not only employs diminution with greater intensity – both its canons contain modified statements of the subject in semiquavers and quavers respectively – but also introduces augmentation as the subject, which is usually in crotchets, is heard in minims in the bass. A suitable climax to the set is provided by No. 14, which, while the number of voices is reduced to four, features the most intense presentation of the subject which is stated in four different rhythms, namely minims, crotchets, quavers and semiquavers, and as such serves to highlight the supreme heights attainable with regard to the combinatorial possibilities of the thematic material.²⁴

Conversely, the canons in the *Musical Offering* are less comprehensive in scope and are dispersed throughout the print. Only five are specifically grouped together in a numbered sequence under the title *Canones diversi super Thema Regium* while the remainder are found at the end of the other main components; the *Canon perpetuus super Thema Regium* is positioned after the three-voiced *ricercar*, the *Canon a 2* and the *Canon a 4* are appended to the six-voiced *ricercar* and the *Canon perpetuus* is placed after the trio sonata.

²⁴ A more detailed discussion of this issue will be included in my forthcoming thesis, which is entitled *New Perspectives on the Canons of J. S. Bach*.

The arrangement of the various components of the *Musical Offering*, and the canons in particular, has long been a subject of debate. Scholars have argued that it does not correspond with the manuscript from which the engraving was made and so have proposed new ordering schemes to replace what they interpret as a somewhat random design that could not possibly reflect Bach's original intentions.²⁵ However, it is no longer valid to query the organisation of the print in light of Gregory Butler's recent clarification that the Schübler brothers employed the *Abklatschvorlage* method and 'traced directly onto the plates, page by page, a fair autograph supplied by the composer'.²⁶ It also seems unlikely that the order of the print was influenced by practical concern to minimise the cost of its production; if Bach had planned a different arrangement, it is surely safe to assume he would have ensured that arrangement was followed, especially in a composition that was being published in honour of the King of Prussia.

In my view, the explanation for the arrangement of the canons relates specifically to the gradual expansion and evolution of the work. According to Butler's recent research, Bach's original concept of the *Musical Offering* consisted only of the three and six part ricercars. An extension to the work's printing provided him with the opportunity to enlarge it considerably through the inclusion of the *Canones diversi super Thema Regium* and the trio sonata.²⁷ Butler's convincing hypothesis opens up the possibility that the series of canons was not

²⁵ For example, Hans T. David argued that Bach actually planned a symmetrical arrangement in which the canons were organised into two groups of five according to their treatment of the royal theme: one group, which presented the theme as *cantus firmus*, was to have been placed after the opening three voiced ricercar and the other group, which treated the theme canonically, was to have been placed before the concluding six part ricercar, thereby providing a frame for the trio sonata at the centre of the collection. This scheme was compromised by the engraver, Johann Georg Schübler, who tried to save space but 'did not realise that here for once the order of movements in a collection of independent compositions was a matter of importance'. Hans T. David, *J. S. Bach's Musical Offering: History, Interpretation and Analysis* (New York: G. Schirmer, 1945), pp. 34–37, 94. Conversely, Michael Marissen has reconstructed a hypothetical sequence of ten canons which he believes should have been positioned at the very end of the work because the order of the *Musical Offering* ought to have corresponded with its advertisement in the *Leipziger Zeitungen* on 30 September 1747. Michael Marissen, 'More Source-Critical Research on Bach's *Musical Offering*', *Bach* 25/1 (1994), 11–27. The advertisement states that the 'elaboration [of the royal theme] consists 1.) in two fugues, one with three, the other with six obbligato parts; 2.) in a sonata for transverse flute, violin, and continuo; 3.) in diverse canons, among which is a *fuga canonica*'. *NBR*, p. 229.

²⁶ Butler also notes that the Schübler brothers would have lacked the 'necessary expertise required for mechanical or freehand engraving of music' because they were skilled in the craft of gun stock carving and ornamental iron incising. Gregory Butler, 'The Printing History of J. S. Bach's *Musical Offering*: New Interpretations', *Journal of Musicology* 19/2 (2002), 328.

²⁷ The printing of the work was extended because the fourth page of the six part ricercar had to be re-engraved, either because of damage to its plate or because substantial revisions rendered the correction of the plate impractical; rather than delay fulfilling the pledge which he made to Frederick the Great during his visit to Potsdam in May 1747 to 'work out this right Royal theme more fully and then make it known to the world' (*NBR*, p. 226), Bach initially sent the three part ricercar along with the *Canones diversi super Thema Regium* and the *Fuga Canonica* in compensation for the missing six part ricercar, while the second instalment contained both the six part ricercar and the trio sonata. Butler, 'The Printing History of J. S. Bach's *Musical Offering*: New Interpretations', 306–331.

always part of Bach's plan for the *Musical Offering*. Instead, Bach may initially have intended to include only the three canons that were appended to the three and six part ricercars.

This supposition corresponds with the summary of the work in the Obituary, believed to have been written by Bach's son, Carl Philipp Emanuel, and his pupil Johann Friedrich Agricola:

After his [Bach's] return to Leipzig, he set down on paper a three-voiced and a six-voiced so-called *ricercar* together with several other intricate little pieces, all on the very theme that had been given him by his Majesty, and this he dedicated, engraved on copper, to the King.²⁸

Although such statements must of course be interpreted cautiously, it is intriguing that no reference is made to the trio sonata, and the phrase 'several other intricate little pieces' seems insufficient to describe the *Canones diversi super Thema Regium*. It is not inconceivable that this description was based on the writers' knowledge of Bach's original plan for the *Musical Offering*.

Some features of the print suggest that the idea of incorporating an identifiable series examining the canonic potential of the theme more extensively emerged only gradually, and that the nine canons and canonic fugue were not originally conceived together. The first canon ascribed with a number, the *Canon 1. a 2 cancrizans*, is not actually the first canon of the work. This is a striking discrepancy as the opening canon, the *Canon perpetuus super Thema Regium*, is particularly suitable for inclusion within the *Canones diversi super Thema Regium* because it states the theme as a *cantus firmus* against a two-voiced canon, in the same way as the canons numbered two to five.

An equally intriguing feature relates to the *Fuga Canonica*, which, although its position after the *Canon 5. a 2 per Tonos* clearly associates it with the *Canones diversi super Thema Regium*, does not actually continue the numbered sequence. I would submit that this distinction stems directly from the initial concept in which canons, although supplementary to the ricercars that Bach was obliged to produce, afforded him with a further opportunity to demonstrate his contrapuntal skill. As the work expanded, Bach applied this pattern of 'ornamenting' the main components as a principle of design, thereby including the *Fuga Canonica*, the fugal elements of which differentiate it sufficiently from the preceding series of canons, and the *Canon perpetuus*, which is appended to the trio sonata.²⁹

An awareness of the gradual development of Bach's approach to the writing of monothematic puzzle canons in the *Musical Offering* and the more advanced application of the idea in the *Fourteen Canons* does not only allow a re-evaluation of the relationship between these works. It also points towards a more precise timeframe for the composition of the *Fourteen Canons*. As mentioned earlier, Ebata

²⁸ NBR, p. 303.

²⁹ Incidentally, the *Fuga Canonica* also served to provide a satisfactory conclusion to the first instalment sent to Frederick the Great as it skilfully amalgamates in microcosm the two genres contained therein.

posits that an early draft of the *Fourteen Canons* was produced at some stage between the holding of the *Canon triplex à 6 Voc* in the Haußmann portrait of 1746 and the dedication of BWV 1077 to Fulde on 15 October 1747. In light of the nature of the progression between these works, I would suggest that the composition of the *Fourteen Canons* either partially coincided with, or else came after the *Musical Offering*, which was produced between May and September 1747.³⁰ Therefore the *Fourteen Canons* were probably written during the summer or autumn months of that year, possibly even as late as September or October in the weeks immediately preceding the presentation of the Fulde canon.

In conclusion, scholars have underestimated the *Fourteen Canons* in many ways. Perhaps because of their miniature dimensions, the literature has tended to rank the *Fourteen Canons* less favourably than the other late works. Indeed, there is a predominant belief that these were simply private theoretical exercises,³¹ important not for their own sake but because they guided the creative focus of Bach's last years and provided the foundation for his more masterly explorations. Although the historical significance of the *Fourteen Canons* has recently been established,³² it has become apparent that their true importance within Bach's oeuvre, perhaps fittingly for an enigmatic work, has remained unrealised. The version of the *Fourteen Canons* presented at the back of the *Handexemplar* of the *Goldberg Variations* constitutes Bach's ultimate appropriation of a genre customarily used in two different contexts, the dedication canon written in a friend's album or the presentation canon depicted in a portrait. In terms of Bach's output as a whole, the *Fourteen Canons* represent a concise summation of his fascination with strict counterpoint.

³⁰ The advertisement in the *Leipziger Zeitungen* on 30 September 1747 indicates that it was completed by this time: 'Since the Royal Prussian Fugue theme, as announced on May 11 of the current year by the Leipzig, Berlin, Frankfurt, and other gazettes, has now left the press, it shall be made known that the same may be obtained at the forthcoming St. Michael's Fair from the author, Capellmeister Bach'. *NBR*, p. 229.

³¹ Bach may actually have planned to produce a second edition of the *Goldberg Variations*, incorporating the corrections and changes that he entered into the *Handexemplar*, along with the *Fourteen Canons*. This is supported by the neatness of the autograph fair copy and the clear indication of Bach's authorship after the title of the work, an attribution that seems somewhat unnecessary given the location of the *Fourteen Canons*, especially if they were solely intended for personal perusal.

³² It is now known that Bach created a virtually exhaustive compendium of canonic types and techniques in order to demonstrate the inherent value and diversity of the genre in response to Stölzel's provocatively simplistic and derogatory theoretical publication entitled *Practischer Beweis*. As was entirely typical of Bach, he chose not to reply verbally but preferred to let his music speak for itself through the creation of a quasi theoretical treatise. Crean, 'G. H. Stölzel's *Practischer Beweis*'. Interestingly, the new chronological scenario presented here suggests that Bach and Stölzel's common membership of the Corresponding Society of Musical Sciences could have been a contributory factor in the creation of the *Fourteen Canons*.