

# Report on the Fifth Johann Sebastian Bach Dialogue Meeting

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There were many firsts at our fifth Dialogue Meeting: it was held away from Oxford for the first time, we sponsored our first event at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, Paul Barz's play *Handling Bach*, and we initiated the Scottish premiere of Bach's *Durchlauchtster Leopold* (BWV 173a). This spirit of innovation was to permeate the entire four-day Dialogue Meeting.

We were based from 11–15 August 2011 at Loretto School, Musselburgh, just outside Edinburgh. Delegates began to arrive on Thursday 11 August to be met by our indefatigable and charming administrator, **Anna Bain Pugh**, who guided us to our rooms. Scotland's reputation for torrential rain was not to be denied, as the River Eske burst its banks in full-hearted welcome, but this did nothing to dampen our spirits. A rousing illustrated lecture on the history of our surroundings by **Peter Smaill** was followed by a luxurious buffet supper in **Pinkie House**, after which two school buses transported us to a private viewing of *Handling Bach* in **Rosslyn Chapel**. Reviving a 1990s translation by **David Bryer** of Paul Barz's original *Eine Mögliche Begegnung*, **Nonesuch Productions** expressed their great appreciation of BNUK sponsorship by laying on a VIP reception for our party in the intervals, with an unforgettable guided tour of Rosslyn chapel after the play. We made our way back to the buses through northern darkness, elated by an intoxicating mix of history, legend and jet-lag.

For those of us who slept well and found the dining room in time, breakfast was an excellent affair. Forget images of economy cuts and school lunches; all the meals served by Loretto School were of superb quality, and a wonderful focal point affording unscheduled time to reflect on many challenging topics.

The theme of the dialogue sessions, **The Future Direction and Shape of Bach Studies**, generated an amazing breadth on what may have seemed a self-evident subject. We allocated ninety minutes to each themed session, with sixty minutes of prepared input acting as catalyst to the all-important public discussion. This was no spectator occasion: the contribution of every delegate was important. To

this end, detailed paper abstracts with specific questions were circulated in advance to all who had registered. The full programme can be found on our website, and the majority of papers will be published in *Understanding Bach*, 6 (2011) and 7 (2012).

Setting an exciting tone for the first session were **Peter Wollny**, **Michael Maul** and **Manuel Bärwald** from the Leipzig Bach Archive. **Visions for Recovering Lost Documents in the Twenty-first Century (I): Eighteenth Century** was the umbrella title, under which Wollny gave a masterful overview of the research produced in the past fifty years or so by the Bach Archive as well as some daring predictions for the coming decades. Maul was challenged to speak on the goals and visions for 'Expedition Bach' in the next half century, and Bärwald shared the results of his research into the Operisti visiting Leipzig. The dialogue discussion moderated by **Ruth Tatlow** raised many searching and unusually penetrating issues that the team from Leipzig handled honestly and with great integrity. Among these was the vexed question of institutional versus individual research and ways in which the archive and organisations such as Bach Network UK could facilitate exchanges of insights and discoveries.

Mercifully the rain held off as we made our way to lunch in the Old Library, where conversations continued to be fuelled by the possibilities of undiscovered documents. Returning to Pinkie House all too soon afterwards, delegates were treated to a perfect post-prandial keynote lecture: a delightfully illustrated presentation on the subject of **Bach in the Twenty-first Century** delivered with great humour and inimitable style by **Sir Nicholas Kenyon**. The musical illustrations, which included orchestral transcriptions by Schoenberg, Stravinsky, Elgar and Webern, were cited several times by delegates during the course of the weekend. Asking where scholarly lines should be drawn, whether it is acceptable to modernise and improve Bach, as Bach the reviser of his own works constantly did, the discussion led to a consideration of the role of Bach's music in this century, whether we are voiceless, if Bach encourages us to do better and if the do-better mentality is part of our voice.

The second session was arguably the most radical of any ever heard in a Bach conference: **Crossing Over: Revisioning Bach and Popular Culture in the Twenty-first Century** with the dynamic combination of **Isabella van Elferen** and **Paula Higgins** ably moderated by **Tobias Plebuch**. The session pushed both participants and Bach studies beyond conventional borders, from the use of Bach's music in the twilight zones of Gothic culture through data gathered from Twitter and YouTube hits indicating the enormous popularity of the Bach-inspired Procol Harum theme. Exploring the ghosts that Bach's music evokes from well-known literary, cinematic and televisual sources, van Elferen moved through more sensitive areas of the Gothic in Lutheran liturgy, while asking her main question: how Gothic is Bach? Citing details from the UK intellectual property case *Fischer v Brooker* (2006), Higgins raised the issue of co-authorship of *A Whiter Shade of Pale*, and what its extraordinary popularity may say about the non-specialist reception of Bach in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. We scarcely scratched the surface of these vast topics in the limited discussion time and it was clear that issues of high and low brow, the 'uncanny', the religious

metaphysical element of the Gothic, and the nature of popular culture, including film, must be taken up at future dialogue meetings. Friday evening gave participants the opportunity either to travel to the city centre to attend events at the Edinburgh festival or to partake of local fare in Musselburgh.

The Chapel was at the centre of the campus, located between boarding houses, dining room and Pinkie House, physically forcing a choice of paths. The excellence of the two **Bach in the Chapel** morning programmes similarly forced a choice between the desire for spiritual recreation and leisurely breakfast conversations. Those who made the sacrifice were rewarded royally by organists **Kaleb Doyle, Katherine Pardee, Iain Simcock** and **Joel Speerstra**, and arrived for the first academic sessions of the day with eyes shining and hearts singing. An extra half hour between breakfast and the academic session would have made this gem of an event accessible to more delegates.

Saturday morning started with a session entitled **Renewing our Heritage: Visions for a Twenty-first Century Bach Methodology**. **Ruth Tatlow** offered a plea for historically informed theory, exposing the anachronisms and pitfalls of some analytical methods used in the twentieth century for Bach's music, and offering examples from her own research into the proportional structures of music that Bach assembled into manuscript or published collections. **Wendy Heller** suggested new ways of understanding Bach's *Magnificat*, BWV 243, drawing on Luther's commentary on this canticle and asking how the individual movements project a feminine voice. Topics raised in the discussion moderated by **Stephen Rose** included the gendered connotations of voice-types and timbres, and the question of whether eighteenth-century theory is adequate to explain music of the period. A lively discussion followed. An over-arching theme of the session was the need for scholars, performers and Bach-lovers to hold a constant dialogue between eighteenth and twenty-first century notions (whether of music theory or gender).

After a coffee break we continued with **Music Ancient and Modern Represented in Bach's Later Leipzig Years**, which focused on the problems of Bach's developing fugal technique. **David Ledbetter** tackled the quasi-palindromic plan of the fugues in Bach's original works for the lute, BWV 997 and 998, and **Yo Tomita** focused on the parallel entries and double counterpoint at the tenth and twelfth in *The Well-Tempered Clavier* Book Two. How Bach acquired the new techniques, and what, if anything, they represented to him, including symmetrical structures, tight frameworks, potential symbolism and the metamorphoses of ideas, were subjects of the fast-moving discourse enabled by moderator **Richard Jones** and that continued far beyond the session.

After lunch delegates changed into more formal lounge suits in readiness for the afternoon and evening events in Edinburgh. The first port of call was the National Library of Scotland, where we heard illustrated lectures on the Balfour Handel collection by **Donald Burrows** and on Weisse's hymnbook by **Reinhard Strohm**. With carefully chosen exhibits displayed for our perusal, and detailed powerpoint slides, we were given insights into these treasures of the National Library. Time for discussion on the cultural theme **Bach, Handel and the Frontiers of the Baroque** was limited, but the panel deftly introduced compelling

arguments about how Bach and Handel might be compared in the light of recent definitions of modernity. **John Butt** starting the ball rolling, responded to by Reinhard Strohm and finally by Donald Burrows, who ended the earnest debate with exemplary diplomacy. Holding up a bar each of Bach and Handel chocolate, for which the manufacturers had decided Bach would be 'plain with '78% kakao', and Handel 'a fine truffle with a fruity centre', Burrows concluded: 'both are excellent tastes, though you would not eat them at the same time'.

Following a move across to the university we were entertained by **Michael Fry**, in a room full of alarmingly live-looking portraits, to the subject of **Leipzig and Edinburgh on the Eve of the Enlightenment**. We moved next to the reception area of the Playfair Library, University of Edinburgh, where we met many university alumni and friends of the **Dunedin Consort** before taking our seats for the Dialogue dinner. The elegant proportions of the paneled room comfortably accommodated 200 guests and a large performing area for the Leopold cantata. **Peter Smaill** opened the proceedings and introduced **John Butt**, who gave a brief introduction to the cantata and then directed the Dunedin singers and players from the harpsichord in an infectiously memorable performance.

The after-dinner speech, delivered with charm and authority by **Sir John Eliot Gardiner**, was a convincing plea for **The Legitimacy of Biography through Music**. To round up the compelling atmosphere of the evening John Scally, Director of University Collections, proposed a vote of thanks to Gardiner and to BNUK for initiating this first ever university celebration of the opening of the Edinburgh festival.

Following breakfast and Bach in the Chapel, Sunday morning's topic was **Visions for Recovering Lost Documents in the Twenty-first Century (ii): Nineteenth Century**. At the heart of this session were prominent figures from central Europe who engaged with Bach's works to educate the next generation. **Szymon Paczkowski** studied 'Bach and Chopin' and **Tanja Kovačević** the little-known piano pedagogue, Joseph Proksch. Paczkowski, who was unable to attend the meeting in person due to illness, demonstrated that Chopin was not only thoroughly familiar with the contents of Czerny's 1837 edition of *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, but that he also owned several other editions of the work. Kovačević reported on manuscripts she had recently unearthed in the Prague Conservatoire, which convey Proksch's careful consideration of the students' varying levels of competence while arranging Bach's BWV 898 for sixteen players on eight pianos. The vitality of the ensuing discussion moderated by **Yo Tomita** showed the enormous value of this new research, and its pertinence to modern scholarship. The session demonstrated that recovering nineteenth-century Bach documents is an area ripe for development, and it is hoped that future dialogue sessions will feature similar exciting discoveries from other geographical regions.

The seventh and final session, **Dialogue Round-up and Ways Forward** led by **Ruth Tatlow** was a free-for-all discussion with questions fielded by BNUK advisory council members. Every aspect of the work of Bach Network UK was discussed, and delegates made many new suggestions that will be implemented in due course. Chief among these was the idea of issuing a call for dialogue study

group sessions a year in advance of each dialogue meeting, rather than the more conventional call for individual papers. We learnt that the open access nature of our website and journal is greatly appreciated and we were encouraged to keep the network open.

After a final lunch many of the delegates departed, the remainder staying for an extra day for a guided tour of the **Russell collection** with **Joel Speerstra** on Monday morning, and events at the Edinburgh festival in the afternoon and evening.

The trustees and advisory council of BNUK would like to thank those who generously donated money and time to make this Fifth Dialogue Meeting and its associated cultural events possible. It was a privilege to help organise such a fruitful dialogue meeting, and as chair of the Advisory Council I would like to thank all delegates and speakers whose generous contributions helped create a warm atmosphere of security and collegial trust in discussion, which unfortunately is a rarity in many musicological meetings today. I am very grateful to Tanja Kovačević and Yo Tomita, my fellow editorial team members, for the countless hours they spent refining and revising the programme and booklets. I would also like to thank the Loretto staff, including the drivers and house staff, whose good humour and cooperation contributed to the smooth running of our ambitious schedule, and Anna Bain Pugh for fielding countless unseen hiccups. Above all, though, thanks must go to Peter Smail as our local contact and Chair of Trustees for imagining, facilitating and organising such a wonderful and culturally rich series of events and locations.