

The Problematical Origins of the “*Generalbaßlehre* of 1738”

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Near the end of 2011 a new volume of the *NBA* was released by Bärenreiter. It is called a supplement and includes notes and studies on thorough-bass, composition and counterpoint along with a section of Bach’s sketches and drafts and finally in the appendix the more recently discovered aria, BWV 1127. In addition to the well-researched and documented rules on thorough-bass found in the Anna Magdalena Bach’s notebooks, there is a presentation and critical discussion of the recently discovered (1999) counterpoint studies in the form of an exchange between Wilhelm Friedemann Bach and his father, all in autograph documents from the period 1736 to 1739 when W. F. Bach was an organist in Dresden.

Of great interest is the analysis and discussion of the *Precepts and Principles for Playing the Thorough-Bass* along with the complete text and musical examples. Below I will present the original German (Appendix 1) along with my English translation (Appendix 2) of the pertinent sections from the *NBA* editor’s introduction and the critical report covering this document. From this the reader will be able ascertain the spurious¹ nature of its origin and claims of authenticity.

The *Precepts and Principles for Playing Four-Part Thorough-Bass or Accompaniment*, or more commonly referred to in its short form as the “*Generalbaßlehre* of 1738”, has attained a false aura of authenticity since the appearance of Philipp Spitta’s monumental Bach biography in which Spitta printed the entire text of this document that he also analyzed and discussed in greater detail in a music journal in 1882.² Spitta was the first Bach scholar to recognize the connection between this document and certain paragraphs contained in a treatise by Friedrich Erhard Niedt. Unfortunately Spitta incorrectly identified the handwriting as Johann Peter Kellner’s (1705-1772), an important, recognized copyist of Bach’s music. As a result, the importance of the

¹ *spurious* [OED]: having an irregular origin, not properly qualified, superficially resembling, but lacking the genuine character or qualities of something.

² Philipp Spitta, “Der Tractat über den Generalbaß und F. Niedts *Musikalische Handleitung*”, in the *AMZ* [*Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*] XVII (1882), Col. 241-245.

“*Generalbaßlehre* of 1738” was elevated to the level of implied authenticity far beyond that which it warrants based upon recent investigation and research. By the time the *NBA Bach-Dokumente II* (1969) presented their research results on this document, it became clear that one unidentified copyist had written or even possibly had supplied (authored?) the title page perhaps at a later date than the remaining text and musical examples which were written in a different hand by another copyist. The first copyist also attempted to make a few corrections to the text but left at least 42 errors in the text and musical examples, some of which are quite serious such as basic mistakes in the harmonies indicated by the figures. It is difficult to imagine that Bach, if he had had any input at all in this document, would have allowed such errors to stand without inspecting the document after it had been written or assigning this task to any of his able subordinates to eliminate at least some of the most glaring errors that appear in it.

In 1984 Hans-Joachim Schulze, who had collaborated with Werner Neumann in publishing the *Bach-Dokumente II* in 1969, introduced a new element into the on-going discussion regarding the authenticity of this document: the handwriting on the title page (along with the few corrections to the text) belongs to Carl August Thieme (1721-1795) who was a student at the *Thomasschule* from 1735-1745.³ Almost immediately the “*Generalbaßlehre* of 1738” regained its previous rank as one of the most important documents revealing in greater detail than other evidence does what Bach’s rules governing figured bass as imparted to the music students under his tutelage looked like. Now some Bach scholars began to confirm and proclaim the legitimacy of this document by simply referring to it as *J. S. Bach’s Precepts and Principles For Playing the Thorough-Bass or Accompanying in Four Parts*, just as Pamela Poulin has done in her facsimile reproduction and discussion of this document published in 1994.⁴ But when, under John Butt’s editorship, *The Cambridge Companion to Bach* was published in 1997, the “*Generalbaßlehre* of 1738” was propelled to a new height of near certainty as reflecting quite directly what Bach taught his students. *The Cambridge Companion* refers to it as follows: “A rather different picture is suggested by the title-page to the short manuscript thorough-bass primer of 1738 attributed, **relatively securely** [my

³ Hans-Joachim Schulze, *Studien zur Bach-Überlieferung im 18. Jahrhundert*, Leipzig and Dresden 1984, p. 127.

⁴ Pamela Poulin, *J. S. Bach’s Precepts and Principles For Playing the Thorough-Bass or Accompanying in Four Parts*, Oxford 1994, pp. 59-101. Oxford 1994, pp. 59-101.

emphasis here and in the following quotations], to Bach.”⁵ Later a reference to Birnbaum’s argument in the Birnbaum/Scheibe debate on Bach’s music and his performances states that a Birnbaum statement “...is strongly reminiscent of the opening definition in the thoroughbass treatise that **Bach adapted from Niedt**.”⁶ and a later one states: “Furthermore, Leibniz’s reference to consonance and dissonance relates directly to many statements in German compositional theory, not least that of **Niedt/Bach** (see Chapter 4, p. 53 above)”

Perhaps recognizing the direction in which Bach scholarship was tending to go by equating Bach’s rules on music theory with Niedt’s directly, Christoph Wolff, in preparing a newly revised edition of the *Bach Reader* [dated November, 1997], took a decisive action to counter the trend that was inevitably leading toward an assessment of this document approaching the level of certainty: he removed the document entirely from this new, up-dated edition, now called *The New Bach Reader*. He explains this removal as follows: “*Deletions*: A very few documents of questionable value have been dropped, as has *The Precepts and Principles...for Playing a Thorough Bass* (which is available in an annotated facsimile edition, prepared by Pamela Poulin, 1994)....”⁷

Only two years later in his major Bach biography, Wolff confounds the direction he had taken by stating:

Instead, he [Bach] formulated his own rules and principles for theoretical subjects (an example is his *Vorschriften und Grundsätze zum vierstimmigen Spielen des General-Baß oder Accompagnement*, Precepts and Principles for Playing the Thoroughbass or Accompanying in Four Parts) [Transmitted in a copy made in 1738 by Carl August Thieme, pupil at St. Thomas’s in 1735-1745. See Poulin, Oxford, 1994] and focused chiefly on practical examples from the vocal and instrumental repertoire.⁸

⁵ *The Cambridge Companion to Bach*, editor John Butt, Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 52 with reference to Schulze BÜ, 1984 pp. 125-7.

⁶ *idem*, p. 56.

⁷ p. x *The New Bach Reader: A Life of Johann Sebastian Bach in Letters and Documents*; edited by Hans T. David and Arthur Mendel; revised and enlarged by Christoph Wolff; Norton, 1998.

⁸ p. 249 Christoph Wolff: *Johann Sebastian Bach: The Learned Musician*, Norton, New York, 2000.

In the meantime Peter Williams in his Bach biography, *J. S. Bach: A Life in Music*, (Cambridge, 2007), states more carefully that Thieme ‘attributes’ the *Vorschriften* of 1738 to Bach.⁹

The conclusion reached in 2011 by Peter Wollny in the *NBA Supplement* is that the “*Vorschriften* of 1738” appear to have originated within the general circle of students who had attended the *Thomasschule* and that Schulze’s thoughts on the transmission of the document still remain uncontested. This, of course, refers to the Thieme connection with the document (only the title page and some of the corrections), but still leaves Wollny to conclude that

...die generelle Lückenhaftigkeit des heute noch greifbaren Materials sowie das Fehlen des ursprünglichen Kontextes – das heißt, die sicherlich weitaus ausführlicheren begleitenden mündlichen Erläuterungen....¹⁰

...our present-day understanding of this is made more difficult by the general fragmentary, incomplete nature of the material evidence still available as well as the lack of the original context; that is, the much more complete oral explanations that certainly must have accompanied these documents....¹¹

And shortly thereafter he confesses:

We are still in the dark regarding the history of its origin and what may have prompted it to be written in the first place. Likewise, the date given on the title page still demands explanation. Even doubts concerning the authenticity of the attribution [to Carl August Thieme (1721-1795) and/or Christian Friedrich Richter (1727-1800)] cannot be completely dispelled.¹² Strictly speaking, the *Generalbaßlehre* consists of three parts that are independent to a large extent and yet appear to complement each other as based upon the wording of their titles. Each of these parts may easily have been written at different times and the authenticity of each demands further investigation.¹³

⁹ p. 342 Peter Williams: *J. S. Bach: A Life in Music*, Cambridge University Press, 2007

¹⁰ p. VIII of the Introduction.

¹¹ idem.

¹² cf. *Bach-Jahrbuch* 1906, p. 136 and *Bach-Jahrbuch* 1909, pp. 153-162.

¹³ p. VIII of the Introduction.

Regarding the Niedt connection, Wollny declares:

There is still no evidence, that J. S. Bach may have edited these passages from Niedt's book, passages in the latter's book which differ from those contained in the Brussels manuscript.¹⁴

As already indicated, the date of the manuscript is in question, thus undermining the veracity of Thieme's recording of the facts at hand which has already been attacked in regard to his unclear attribution of another manuscript for which he supplied only the title: *BWV 598*, the so-called "Pedal-Exercitium", which is now included in the *MGG2* listing of works by C. P. E. Bach, and which, in any case, has been removed from the list of legitimate works by J. S. Bach by the *NBA*.

Another by-product of the investigations surrounding "*Generalbaßlehre* of 1738" is the overvaluation of Niedt's *Musicalische Handleitung* and his importance for and possible influence on J. S. Bach. The Niedt/Bach connection may be highly overrated due to some general statements on the purpose and value of figured bass which bear some similarity with each other. There is no evidence that Bach may have used, owned or at least had some acquaintance with Niedt's treatise. Wollny raises the question that if the "*Generalbaßlehre* of 1738"

might actually be evidence for J. S. Bach's teaching methods, a relatively early period of origin can be assumed anyway since it is hardly imaginable that during his Leipzig tenure Bach would still have chosen the somewhat antiquated examples while doing without any discussion of the far more complex aspects of modern harmony....¹⁵

It stands to reason that Bach, during his Leipzig period, certainly would have preferred the much better instruction manual on thorough-bass by Johann David Heinichen. This book, with copious musical examples, appeared in two editions, one in 1711 and the later expanded edition in 1728, a book that Bach actually sold from his home (he must have had numerous copies of it on hand in the years subsequent to 1728).

¹⁴ idem.

¹⁵ p. IX of the Introduction.

Returning to Friedrich Erhard Niedt, whose biography by Fritz Oberdörffer appears in the *MGG1* and relates some of the following details: Niedt was born in 1674 in Jena and died in Copenhagen in 1708. Music was for Niedt primarily an avocation and only occasionally was he devoted to it full-time. In Jena he was a notary public and, in a later report, he mentions that he was working hard at a job which had nothing to do with music. Although he applied for numerous positions as an organist, he never succeeded in obtaining one. At the beginning of the 18th century, Niedt took up residence in Copenhagen, where his lack of success followed him as he failed to be accepted as organist at the St. Nicolas Church. In one of his treatises, he mentions that he had embarked on the composition of a yearly cycle of church cantatas. For this not a shred of evidence exists and it may simply have remained a plan he never carried out. Oberdörffer assesses Niedt's abilities as composer as follows:

Als Komponist ist Niedt, nach den wenigen Proben in seinen Schriften zu urteilen, über eine zum Teil recht trockene Mittelmäßigkeit nicht hinausgekommen, was sich auch schon aus Äußerungen entnehmen läßt wie zum Beispiel, daß der ganze Kontrapunkt doch nur eine "Bärenheuterey" sei und daß er aus seinen Kantaten alle Fugen und Hallelujas verbannt habe, da sie doch nur Ekel und Verdruß erweckten.¹⁶

Judging from the few music examples presented in his treatises, Niedt, as a composer, never succeeded in surpassing a rather dry level of mediocrity. This is already clear from his statements, for example, where he describes all types of counterpoint as simply *nequitia* = "worthless stuff" or *inertia* = "lack of skill" [definitions from the *DWB*] and that he had banned from his cantatas all fugues and hallelujahs since all that they do is to awaken feelings of disgust and annoyance.¹⁷

Johann Mattheson, after being pursued by his publisher for many years to edit Niedt's *Musicalische Handleitung* based on the notes left behind after his death, finally relented to undertake the task which proved to be more difficult than he had imagined since the notes were error-prone and confusing, thus requiring considerable effort on Mattheson's part to present an understandable and reasonably musically correct version of what Niedt might have intended. The following comments in the Preface to Part 2 of the *Musicalische Handleitung* and in numerous footnotes relate Mattheson's perception of Niedt's writing and musical abilities:

¹⁶ *MGG1* Bd 09, 1509-1510 Bärenreiter, Kassel, 1986.

¹⁷ *MGG1* Vol. 09, Col. 1509-1510 Bärenreiter, Kassel, 1986.

Preface § 4. If I, according to the usual rules for editing, were to list here all the innumerable places in this book [by Niedt] (which happens to be my 9th publicly known attempt at this) where I had to correct either several musical or syntax errors as well as misprints, then the publisher, (for whom I revised, improved and reorganized this part as a favor), would have incurred unnecessary expenses. I call the places where these errors occur ‘innumerable’ only because it would be too tiring to count them due to their large number. I will definitely content myself with the thought that an absent author [a reference to the already deceased Niedt] will many times hardly be able to recognize his own creations.

§ 5. In the meantime everyone who owns the previous edition will certainly see what and how much I have accomplished in [preparing] this one. I am not counting [all] the printing errors and all the places that required completion [further explanation] or needed to be rejected [removed].

p. 21 Footnote (k) Although this work [Niedt’s book] does bore me not too little [quite a bit] in other respects, I can state quite frankly that nothing tires me as much as the never-ending, annoying repetition of the key of c that is used in all of the examples.

p. 47 footnote (c) Here everything was in a complete mess/muddle.

p. 74 Footnote (t) Other [instruction books on thorough-bass] have included this rule which is as simplistic as it is wrong. In no way does it belong among the rules for a figured [thorough] bass....

p. 92 Footnote (p) In the first edition of this chapter the content of this chapter was placed [by Niedt] in the 12th main section and he [Niedt] had already begun giving instructions in the 10th and 11th sections on matters for which the reader had not yet been prepared. But because this did not seem to go well this way, the [regular, chronological treatment of this] course had to be interrupted which then resulted in chaotic confusion. In order to remove this muddled state of affairs, [I {Mattheson} have placed here] a type of limited dictionary of musical terms appears here. This dictionary can either be read before proceeding or bypassing it according to whether the reader finds it necessary or not for understanding the material that follows it.¹⁸

Aside from this spurious document, the “*Generalbaßlehre* of 1738”, there is no hard evidence whatsoever of the Niedt/Bach connection. To be sure, the NBA Supplement

¹⁸ Friederich Erhard Niedt *Musicalische Handleitung [Part 2] A Concise Music Manual: On Creating Variations Based upon Thorough Bass....* 2nd edition corrected and expanded with various basically correct comments and an appendix containing the registrations of more than 60 organs provided by J. Mattheson. (Hamburg, 1721).

(2011) does mention the theory that since Niedt had attended the University of Jena and had studied music with Johann Nikolaus Bach, Niedt had absorbed all that he knew about music theory from the latter 'Jena' Bach. Whether the information conveyed was actually a transmission of J. N. Bach's music theory lessons is left open to wide speculation which could also include the possibility that some of the general definitions of thorough-bass may have been traditionally discussed and transmitted within the extended Bach family even before Niedt published his treatise, in which case J. S. Bach would not have needed to consult or suggest Niedt's treatise as the basis of study for his music students.

In conclusion, the new NBA Supplement (2011) has presented the "*Generalbaßlehre* of 1738" along with an in-depth analysis of the historical as well as the current scholarship that has treated this rather controversial subject which has vacillated from total acceptance (Spitta) to its recent removal from bona fide documents that can be related to J. S. Bach (Wolff). Along its historical path of acceptance or denial by Bach experts, some have included exaggerated claims that conjured up the picture of Bach dictating directly its contents to his *Thomaner* music students, while others have pointed to the numerous, uncorrected, glaring errors it contains. The unanswered questions of a very serious nature for any academic research devoted to this document still remain: its provenance, other than it seems to have originated within the wide circle of the many students who, as *Thomaner*, had some degree of association with J. S. Bach, is unclear. There are two different types of handwriting involved and these may have originated at different times, perhaps years or even decades apart. Certainly the author of the title page, Thieme, deserves more careful scrutiny, since he was also involved in creating two other title pages with the inauthentic attributions indicated above. His claim on the title page that J. S. Bach prepared these instructional materials (rules with notated music examples) for his students does therefore raise some serious concerns as indicated above as does the Niedt/Bach connection as well.

Appendix 1 – The Original NBA Supplement in German

Johann Sebastian Bach: Neue Ausgabe Sämtlicher Werke

NBA [=Neue Bach Ausgabe], Supplement,

editor Peter Wollny, Bärenreiter BA 5291, Kassel, etc. 2011.

Einleitung S. VIII-XIV. [Peter Wollny]

I. Aufzeichnungen zur Generalbaßlehre S. 1-38.

S. 3-36

1.

Des Königlichen Hoff-*Compositeurs* und Capellmeisters ingleichen

Directoris Musices wie auch *Cantoris* der Thomas-Schule

Herrn *Johann Sebastian Bach*

zu *Leipzig*

Vorschriften und Grundsätze zum vierstimmigen

spielen des *General-Bass* oder *Accompagne-*

ment.

für

seine *Scholaren* in der Music.

1738.

S. VIII

Trotz seines andauernden Interesses an der Vermittlung seiner Kunst beabsichtigte Bach offenbar nicht, die Inhalte und Methoden seines Unterrichts in ein didaktisch geschlossenes System oder gar in die Form eines ausformulierten Lehrwerks zu bringen. Sein gänzlich aus der Musizier- und Kompositionspraxis erwachsener Ansatz ist auch in einer Bemerkung seines Sohnes Carl Philipp Emanuel dokumentiert, derzufolge der Vater mit seinen Schülern „gleich an das Nützliche“ ging (*Bach-Dok III*, Nr. 803). Diese Hintergründe mögen die Beschaffenheit und den Charakter der hier vorgelegten

erhaltenen Zeugnisse erklären. Auch wenn die generelle Lückenhaftigkeit des heute noch greifbaren Materials sowie das Fehlen des ursprünglichen Kontextes – das heißt, die sicherlich weitaus ausführlicheren begleitenden mündlichen Erläuterungen – unser heutiges Verständnis oft erschweren, ergibt sich in der Gesamtheit doch ein eindrucksvolles Bild von Bachs Lehrtätigkeit.

1. Aufzeichnungen zur Generalbaßlehre

Die sogenannte Generalbaßlehre ist in einer von unbekannter Hand geschriebenen Quelle des mittleren 18. Jahrhunderts überliefert, die sich heute als Teil der Sammlung Wagener in der Bibliothek des Brüsseler Konservatoriums befindet.

Entstehungsgeschichte und –anlaß sowie die praktische Verwendung der Abhandlung liegen ebenso im Dunkeln wie die Deutung der auf der Titelseite zu findenden Jahreszahl 1738. Selbst Zweifel an der Echtheit der Zuschreibung können nicht völlig ausgeräumt werden. [Vgl. *Bach-Jahrbuch* 1906, S. 136, und *Bach-Jahrbuch* 1909, S. 153-162.]

Die Generalbaßlehre besteht, genau genommen, aus drei voneinander weitgehend unabhängigen, inhaltlich und von der Formulierung ihrer Titel her jedoch sich ergänzenden Teilen, die durchaus zu unterschiedlichen Zeiten entstanden sein können und deren Authentizität einzeln zu prüfen ist. Teil 1 trägt den Titel „Kurtzer Unterricht von den so genannten *General Bass*“ und enthält eine knappe Erläuterung der wichtigsten Regeln zur musikalischen Realisierung der Generalbaßziffern; er ist von der Sache her den „Regeln vom *General Bass*“ im zweiten Clavierbüchlein der Anna Magdalena Bach vergleichbar, weist jedoch keine direkte inhaltliche Verbindung zu diesen Aufzeichnungen auf. Dies muß nicht zwingend als Argument gegen die Echtheit des „Kurtzen Unterrichts“ gewertet werden, denn wie die von Johann Christoph Friedrich Bach unter dem Titel „Einige höchst nötige Regeln vom *General Basse*. di J. S. B.“ ebenfalls in das Clavierbüchlein A. M. Bachs eingetragenen Anweisungen zeigen, sah sich Bach beim Unterrichten offenbar wiederholt veranlaßt, gleichsam aus dem Stand heraus ein Regelsystem zu entwerfen, gelangte dabei jedoch kaum über die ersten Schritte hinaus. Bachs Lehrmethode war wohl stark von den konkreten Bedürfnissen des jeweiligen Schülers geprägt. Die zitierte Äußerung C. P. E. Bachs unterstreicht dieses durch und durch praxisorientierte Verfahren.

Teil 2 trägt den Titel „Gründlicher Unterricht des *General-Basses*“ und lehnt sich weitgehend an den ersten Teil von Friedrich Erhard Niedts Abhandlung *Musicalische Handleitung oder Gründlicher Unterricht* (Hamburg 1700, ²/1710) an. Da Niedt sich zur Zeit der Abfassung seines Traktats im Umfeld der Universität Jena bewegte und zum Schülerkreis Johann Nikolaus Bachs gehörte, ist anzunehmen, daß in dieser Schrift die Lehrmethoden des „Jenaer Bach“ in ihren Grundzügen festgehalten sind. Ob die in der Brüsseler Quelle vorliegenden Abweichungen gegenüber der Druckfassung Niedts auf redaktionelle Eingriffe J. S. Bachs zurückgehen, ist bislang nicht erwiesen. Einerseits wäre denkbar, daß unter Bachs Namen überlieferte Fassung nur [IX] mittelbar auf Niedts gedruckten Traktat zurückgeht, also auf eine Abschrift, die manche oder gar sämtliche Abweichungen bereits enthielt. Andererseits, ist aber auch mit der Möglichkeit zu rechnen, daß die „Fassung Bach“ auf einer älteren, in dieser Form nicht gedruckten Fassung Niedts basiert. Unabhängig von diesen Überlegungen müßte, sofern die Brüsseler Quelle des „Gründlichen Unterrichts“ tatsächlich ein Zeugnis von J. S. Bachs Lehrtätigkeit darstellt, wohl ohnehin eine verhältnismäßig frühe Entstehung angenommen werden; denn es ist kaum vorstellbar, daß Bach in seiner Leipziger Zeit noch die etwas altertümlich wirkenden Beispiele ausgewählt und auf eine Diskussion der weitaus komplexeren modernen Harmonik verzichtet hätte, zumal ab 1728 Johann David Heinichens grundlegende Generalbaßlehre verfügbar, an deren Vertrieb Bach sich beteiligte (vgl. *Dok. II*, Nr. 260). [Ob Bach die frühere, bereits 1711 in Hamburg erschienene Fassung von Heinichens Abhandlung bekannt war, ist nicht gewiß.]

S. 28

Kritischer Bericht

Quelle: Abschrift aus der Mitte des 18. Jahrhunderts, Brüssel, Conservatoire Royal de Musique, Signatur: 27.224 MSM. [Vollständige Faksimileausgabe in Pamela Poulin, *J. S. Bach's Precepts and Principles For Playing the Thorough-Bass or Accompanying in Four Parts*, Oxford 1994, S. 59-101.]

21 Bll. (18,5 x 23,5 cm), ohne Wasserzeichen. Eine vermutlich im 19. Jahrhundert hinzugefügte Foliierung ist durch starken Beschnitt beim Einbinden der Handschrift teilweise verloren gegangen. Die Foliierung ist zudem fehlerhaft, wie ab Bl. 13 (versehen mit der Ziffer 12) zu erkennen ist; der Fehler wird hier durch die Bezeichnung 2a für

Bl. 3 ausgeglichen. Ein aus dem 19. Jahrhundert stammendes Vorsatzblatt trägt auf der Vorderseite von der Hand des Marburger Arztes und Autographensammlers Guido Richard Wagener die Aufschrift *Joh. Seb. Bach | Generalbaßregeln. | Abschrift | 1738. | Leipzig.*

Der Schreiber der Titelseite ist von Hans-Joachim Schulze mit dem Leipziger Pädagogen und Musiker Carl August Thieme (1721-1795) gleichgesetzt worden. Thieme war von 1735 bis 1745 Alumne der Leipziger Thomasschule, wirkte nach seinem Studium an der dortigen Universität zunächst von 1752 bis 1756 als Kantor der Nikolaischule, rückte anschließend zum Tertius auf und wurde schließlich Konrektor der Thomasschule. [Hans-Joachim Schulze, *Studien zur Bach-Überlieferung im 18. Jahrhundert*, Leipzig und Dresden 1984, S. 125-127.] Von der Hand dieses Schreibers stammen außerdem die Titel zur Originalhandschrift des sogenannten Pedal-Exercitiums BWV 598 sowie – vermutlich – zu einer apokryphen Sammlung mit der Aufschrift „Sebastian Bach’s Choral-Buch“. [Vgl. Hans-Joachim Schulze. „Sebastian Bachs Choralbuch“ in Rochester, NY?[sic], in *Bach-Jahrbuch* 1981, S. 123-130.] Der Text der Generalbaßlehre wurde nach Schulze von einem anderen nicht identifizierten Schreiber angefertigt.

Die Berücksichtigung einer bisher noch nicht angemessen ausgewerteten Quelle [Erstmals erwähnt bei Peter Wollny, *Studies in the Music of Wilhelm Friedemann Bach: Sources and Style*, Diss. Harvard University 1993, S. 44-46.] läßt es allerdings ratsam erscheinen, die soeben referierten Ermittlungen vorerst als Hypothesen anzusehen, deren Gültigkeit erneut zu prüfen ist. Das in der British Library aufbewahrte umfangreiche Konvolut Add. Ms. 32072 enthält unter anderem von der Hand des Schreibers der Generalbaßlehre zahlreiche Abschriften mit Klaviermusik, darunter Arrangements von Ouverturen und Arien aus Opern von Carl Heinrich Graun und Johann Adolph Hasse, Sinfonien und Sonaten von Johann Joachim Agrell, Wilhelm Friedemann Bach, Johann Adolph Hasse, Johann Heinrich Rolle und Friedrich dem Großen, sowie Solostimmen zu Konzerten von ungenannten Komponisten. Von besonderem Interesse für die Bach-Forschung ist eine Abschrift der Fantasia BWV 906 [Vgl. den *Krit. Bericht IV/9.1*, S. 206]. Die in dem Londoner Konvolut reichlich vorliegenden, nachweislich über einen größeren Zeitraum hinweg entstandenen Schriftzeugnisse legen zunächst nahe, Titel Text und Notenbeispiele der Generalbaßlehre ein und derselben Hand zuzuweisen, wobei Noten und Text einer früheren Phase anzugehören scheinen als der Titel. Mehrere, offenbar von der Hand des hier betrachteten

Schreibers herrührende Possessorvermerke in der Quelle Add. Ms. 32072 (Bl. 2r, 7r und 84r) lauten „Richter“ bzw. „CFRichter“ (mit monogrammartig verschlungenen Initialen). Das in diesen Abschriften vorherrschende Wasserzeichen (Lilie + Monogramm CV) ist augenscheinlich identisch mit Weiß 73. Papier dieses Typs wurde von Bach in den späten 1740er Jahren verwendet, und mit einer solchen Datierung ließe sich auch der Repertoirebefund der Londoner Quelle vereinbaren: Das im Zusammenhang mit dem Wasserzeichen Weiß 73 auftretende frühe Schriftstadium des Schreibers findet sich etwa in den Kopien der Ouverturen zu Grauns Opern *Adriano* (1746), *Cajo Fabricio* (1746) und *Angelica e Medorus* (1749).

Die Identität des Schreibers bedarf noch weiterer Klärung. Ein aus Chemnitz stammender Christian Friedrich Richter (geb. 1727) war von 1741-1748 Alumne der Thomasschule [Vgl. Bernhard Friedrich Richter, *Stadtpfeifer und Alumnen der Thomasschule in Leipzig zu Bachs Zeit*, in *Bach-Jahrbuch* 1906, S. 32-78, speziell S. 74.]; er ist vermutlich identisch mit einem Träger desselben Namens, der nach langen Jahren als Substitut von 1771 bis 1800 das Organistenamt in Ernstthal bei Glauchau bekleidete [Angaben nach Reinhard Vollhardt, *Geschichte der Cantoren und Organisten von den Städten im Königreich Sachsen*, Berlin 1899 (Reprint Leipzig 1978), S. 418]. Leider scheinen von diesem C. F. Richter keine eigenhändigen Schriftzeugnisse erhalten zu sein, so daß die Zuweisung der Generalbaßlehre an ihn bis auf weiteres hypothetisch bleiben muß.

Von diesen Ermittlungen unberührt bleiben die Feststellung, daß die Abschrift der Generalbaßlehre aus dem Umkreis der Thomasschule stammt, sowie die von Schulze angestellten Überlegungen zu Überlieferung der Quelle. [Schulze BÜ, S. 127.]

42 Fehler

Appendix 2 – The Original NBA Supplement in English

NBA Supplement [NBA = Neue Bach Ausgabe]

Johann Sebastian Bach: Neue Ausgabe Sämtlicher Werke, Supplement

editor Peter Wollny; Bärenreiter BA 5291, Kassel, etc., 2011.

Introduction pp. VIII-XIV [Peter Wollny]

I. Notes on the Thorough-Bass Lessons [*Generalbaßlehre*] pp. 1-38.

pp. 3-36

1.

Precepts and Principles

for

Playing Four-Part Thorough-Bass or Accompaniment

Prepared For His Music Students

by the

Royal Court Composer and Capellmeister

as well as

Director of Music and Cantor at the St. Thomas School in Leipzig

Mr. Johann Sebastian Bach.

1738

p. VIII

Despite his continual interest in imparting the elements of his art, Bach obviously did not intend to present the content and methods of his instruction as an entire system that could be used for teaching nor did he even attempt them as a properly formulated textbook. His approach to teaching was based entirely on the practical aspects of musicianship and composing as seen documented in a comment by his son Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, according to whom his father immediately directed his students toward the practical and useful aspects of music instruction. This background might begin to

explain the type and character of the evidence which will be presented here. Even if our present-day understanding of this is made more difficult by the general fragmentary, incomplete nature of the material evidence still available as well as the lack of the original context; that is, the much more complete oral explanations that certainly must have accompanied these documents, nevertheless taken in its entirety it leads to an impressive illustration of Bach's activities as a teacher.

1. Notes on the *Generalbaßlehre* [theory of thorough-bass, a manual of lessons on thorough-bass]

The so-called *Generalbaßlehre* has survived in a source, a written document in an unknown hand, from the middle of the 18th century. Today it is part of the Wagener Collection in the Library of the Brussels Conservatory. We are still in the dark regarding the history of its origin and what may have prompted it to be written in the first place. Likewise, the date given on the title page still demands explanation. Even doubts concerning the authenticity of the attribution [to Carl August Thieme (1721-1795) and/or Christian Friedrich Richter (1727-1800)] cannot be completely dispelled [cf. *Bach-Jahrbuch* 1906, p. 136 and *Bach-Jahrbuch* 1909, pp. 153-162].

Strictly speaking, the *Generalbaßlehre* consists of three parts that are independent to a large extent and yet appear to complement each other as based upon the wording of their titles. Each of these parts may easily have been written at different times and the authenticity of each demands further investigation.

Part 1 has the title "Short Instruction on the So-Called Thorough-Bass" and contains a succinct explanation of the most important rules governing the musical realization of the numbers used in figured bass. Basically it is comparable to "Rules for Thorough-Bass" contained in the second *Clavierbüchlein* for Anna Magdalena Bach without, however, exhibiting any direct connection in regard to content. This in itself should not be assessed as a compelling argument against the authenticity of these 'short instructions' for just as we can see from the section entitled "Several most important rules on thorough-bass by J. S. B." which Johann Christoph Friedrich Bach wrote out in the aforementioned A. M. Bach's *Clavierbüchlein*, J. S. Bach obviously felt himself repeatedly obliged while giving instructions to devise a system of rules off the cuff and

then hardly succeeded however in going beyond the first steps. Bach's teaching method was very likely influenced strongly by the concrete needs of each individual student.

The aforementioned quote by C. P. E. Bach emphasizes this process which is thoroughly based upon practical considerations.

Part 2 has the title "Proper Instruction in Thorough-Bass" follows for the most part the first part of Friedrich Erhard Niedt's treatise *Musicalische Handleitung oder Gründlicher Unterricht* (Hamburg, 1700; 2nd edition 1710). Since Niedt, at the time when he wrote this treatise, was active in and around the University of Jena and was counted among Johann Nikolaus Bach's music students, it can be assumed that this book contains an outline of the essential teaching methods used by this Bach who was known as the 'Bach from Jena'. There is still no evidence, that J. S. Bach may have edited these passages from Niedt's book, passages in the latter's book which differ from those contained in the Brussels manuscript. On the one hand, it would be conceivable that the version attributed to J. S. Bach [IX] stems only indirectly from Niedt's published treatise, more specifically, from a copy which already contained some or even all deviations. On the other hand, the possibility must be considered that the 'Bach version' was based on an even older manuscript version than the version represented in Niedt's book.

Independent of these considerations and insofar as the Brussels source for the 'Proper Instruction' might actually be evidence for J. S. Bach's teaching methods, a relatively early period of origin can be assumed anyway since it is hardly imaginable that during his Leipzig tenure Bach would still have chosen the somewhat antiquated examples while doing without any discussion of the far more complex aspects of modern harmony particularly since Johann David Heinichen's *Generalbaßlehre*, a fundamental instruction manual on thorough-bass, was available in print since 1728, a book which Bach offered for sale from his apartment (cf. *Bach-Dokumente II*, no. 260) (it is not certain that Bach was acquainted with Heinichen's first edition of this book which appeared in print as early as 1711 in Hamburg).

Critical Report

Source: a document copy from the middle of the 18th century, Brussels, Conservatoire Royal de Musique, call number: 27.224 MSM. [A complete facsimile edition available as: Pamela Poulin, *J. S. Bach's Precepts and Principles For Playing the Thorough-Bass or Accompanying in Four Parts*, Oxford 1994, pp. 59-101.]

21 pages (18.5 x 23.5 cm) without watermark. The numbering of the pages, probably added during the 19th century has been partially lost when the pages were cut to size during the binding process of the entire document. In addition, the numbering is incorrect as can be seen beginning with page 13 which has the number 12. In this NBA edition, the numbering is adjusted accordingly by using the designation 2a for page 3. An end paper from the 19th century has on the front of it an inscription written by the Marburg doctor and original document collector Guido Richard Wagener: *Joh. Seb. Bach | Generalbaßregeln. | Abschrift | 1738. | Leipzig.*

The author of the title page has been equated with/compared to [*gleichsetzen*] Carl August Thieme (1721-1795), a Leipzig teacher and musician, by Hans-Joachim Schulze. Thieme was officially enrolled at the Leipzig *Thomasschule* from 1735 to 1745 and, after completing his studies at the University of Leipzig, he was at first the cantor at the *Nikolaischule* and after that held the position of *Tertius* and finally became the vice principal at the *Thomasschule* [Hans-Joachim Schulze: *Studien zur Bach-Überlieferung im 18. Jahrhundert*, Leipzig and Dresden 1984, pp. 125-127]. The same handwriting appears in the title of the original manuscript for the so-called "Pedal-Exercitium" BWV 598 [NBA KB IV/11 pp. 83-88, footnote 18 indicates that this work is listed in the C. P. E. Bach-Verzeichnis in the *MGG2P*, Bd. 1, Kassel 1999, Col. 1339f] as well as – this is based upon pure supposition – the title for the fake collection with the title "Sebastian Bach's Choral-Buch". [cf. Hans-Joachim Schulze. „*Sebastian Bachs Choralbuch*” in Rochester, NY?[sic], in *Bach-Jahrbuch* 1981, pp. 123-130.] According to Schulze, the text of the thorough-bass manual was written by another yet unidentified copyist.

Taking into account another source not adequately evaluated and analyzed, [originally mentioned by Peter Wollny, *Studies in the Music of Wilhelm Friedemann Bach: Sources and Style*, Diss. Harvard University 1993, pp. 44-46] it would appear advisable to be sure to view the above findings for the present as hypotheses, the validity of which must be checked again. The extensive bundle of documents kept in the British Library with the call number Add. Ms. 32072 contains among other items numerous copies of keyboard music among which are overtures and arias from operas by Carl Heinrich Graun and Johann Adolph Hasse, sinfonias and sonatas by Johann Joachim Agrell, Wilhelm Friedemann Bach, Johann Adolph Hasse, Johann Heinrich Rolle and Frederick the Great as well as the solo parts for concertos by unnamed composers. All of these are in the same handwriting as that of the copyist of the *Generalbaßlehre*. Of particular interest for Bach researchers is a copy of the Fantasia BWV 906 [cf. *NBA Critical Report IV/9.1*, p. 206]. The numerous handwriting samples from this London collection demonstrably covering a larger period than the *Generalbaßlehre* would seem to suggest that the text of the title and the music examples can be attributed to the same copyist though the musical notation and text seem to belong to an earlier phase than the title. Several of the ownership markings in the source Add. Ms. 32072 (pages 2r, 7r and 84f) are obviously in the hand of the copyist in question here and show “Richter” and “CFRichter” respectively (with intertwined initials resembling a monogram). The predominant watermark (lily + monogram CV) appearing in this copies is visibly identical with Weiß 73. Paper of this type was used by Bach in the late 1740s, a dating which is consistent with the results of the repertoire found in the London source: the early stage of this copyist’s handwriting connected with the watermark Weiß 73 is also found in the copies of the overtures to Graun’s operas *Adriano* (1746), *Cajo Fabricio* (1746) and *Angelica e Medorus* (1749).

The identity of the copyist still demands further clarification. There was a Christian Friedrich Richter (born 1727) from Chemnitz who was officially enrolled at the *Thomasschule* from 1741-1748 [cf. Bernhard Friedrich Richter, *Stadtpfeifer und Alumnen der Thomasschule in Leipzig zu Bachs Zeit*, in the *Bach-Jahrbuch* 1906, pp. 32-78, specifically p. 74]. Presumably he is a person with the same name who, after serving as a substitute organist from 1771 to 1800 became the main organist for the church in Ernstthal near Glauchau [Information provided by Reinhard Vollhardt, *Geschichte der Cantoren und Organisten von den Städten im Königreich Sachsen*, Berlin 1899 (Reprint Leipzig 1978), p. 418]. Unfortunately

there are no surviving documents in the handwriting of this C. F. Richter so that to attribute to him the authorship of the *Generalbaßlehre* will have to remain hypothetical for now.

Untouched by all these findings is the observation that the copy of the *Generalbaßlehre* comes from those associated with the *Thomasschule* as per the point of view presented by Schulze regarding the transmission of this source [Hans-Joachim Schulze, *Studien zur Bach-Überlieferung im 18. Jahrhundert*, Leipzig and Dresden 1984, p. 127].

42 errors