

BACH SUGGESTS IMPROVEMENTS IN THE ORGAN OF ST. BLASIUS' CHURCH

EXCERPT FROM THE PROCEEDINGS OF A PARISH MEETING

Actum, February 21, 1708

Dom. Consul Senior Dr. Meckbach: The new organist, Mr. Bach, had observed various defects in the organ of the Church of St. Blasius and had submitted in writing a project for remedying them and perfecting the instrument.¹¹ He read [the proposal given below] and asked:

(1) Whether the work should be carried out as projected; (2) That *Commissarii* be appointed to make the agreement; and (3) Someone having offered to purchase the small organ in the choir loft, whether the committee should be charged to come to terms with the interested party.

Conclusum:

ad 1. Affirmatur

ad 2. Denominati Mr. Bellstedt, Mr. Reiss, Mr. Sebastian Vockerodt, with instructions to come to as close an agreement as possible, and if need be to give the organ builder the small organ in lieu of [an additional payment of] 50 thlr., if he should not agree to complete the entire organ for 200 thlr.

"PROJECT FOR NEW REPAIRS TO THE ORGAN OF ST. BLASIUS' CHURCH"

Bach's Memorandum

(1) The lack of wind must be made up by the addition of three good new bellows to take care of the *Oberwerk*, the *Rückpositiv*, and the new *Brustwerk*.¹²

¹¹ According to J. L. Albrecht, the organ contained, after the improvements suggested by Bach had been carried out, 38 sounding stops, serving three keyboards and pedal.

¹² Jakob Adlung, in his *Musica Mechanica Organoedi* (1768) gives the following explanation of these terms: "Since, then, when there is more than one manual there are, as it were, several organs together, distinctions are made among them according to size and according to position. What belongs to the upper manual is called the *Oberwerk* [Upper Organ]; what is before us is called the *Brustwerk* [Breast Organ] or *Brust*; what is sometimes constructed behind the [organist's] back is called the *Rückpositiv* [Back Positive]. These *Rückpositive* were formerly much more in use than they are now, when everything is included in one case, which, moreover, is much better. Meanwhile the usage has crept in among us of calling small organs, or the least important manual in an organ, with that which belongs to it, the *Rückpositiv*. When there are more than two manuals, one is sometimes called *das mittlere Werk* [the Middle Organ].

"One manual ordinarily contains the noblest and most penetrating stops, and is accordingly sometimes called the *Hauptmanual* [Principal Manual], the *Hauptwerk* [Principal Organ], the *Werk kar' éξοχήν* [the Chief Organ], whether it lies above or below. For example, in the organ at St. Stephen's in Bremen there are three manuals, of which one is called the *Werk*, the second the *Oberwerk*, and the third the *Brust*. The *Oberwerk* is not always to be considered the most

(2) The four old bellows now present must be adapted, with stronger wind pressure, to the new 32-foot Sub-Bass and the other bass stops.

(3) The old wind chests must all be taken out and freshly supplied with such wind conduction that one stop alone and also all the stops together can be used without alteration of the pressure, which has never been possible in the past and yet is very necessary.

(4) Then follows the 32-foot Sub-Bass or so-called *Untersatz* of wood, which gives the whole organ the most solid foundation (*die beste Gravität*). This stop must now have its own wind chest.

(5) The Trombone Bass must be supplied with new and larger pipes (*corpora*), and the mouthpieces must be quite differently arranged so that this stop can produce a much more solid tone (*eine viel bessere Gravität*).

(6) The new chimes desired by the parishioners to be added to the Pedal, consisting of 26 bells of 4-foot tone; which bells the parishioners will acquire at their own expense, and the organ builder will then install them.

(7) As regards the Upper Manual, instead of the Trumpet (which will be taken out) a *Fagotto* of 16-foot tone will be installed, which is useful for all kinds of new ideas (*inventiones*) and sounds very fine (*delicat*) in concerted music (*in die Music*).

(8) Further, in place of the *Gemshorn* (which is likewise to be taken out) there is to be a *Viol di Gamba* 8 foot, which will concord admirably with the 4-foot *Salicinal* already included in the *Rückpositiv*. *Item*, instead of the 3-foot *Quinta* (which is also to be taken out)

(9) a 3-foot *Nassat* could be installed. The other stops now included in the Upper Manual can remain, as also the entire *Rückpositiv*, although all of these must be tuned again anyway in the course of the repairs.

(10) Now as far as the most important matter is concerned, the new little *Brustpositiv*, the following stops could be included in it.

In front, three Diapasons (*Principalia*), namely:

- | | |
|---|----------------------------|
| (a) <i>Quinta</i> 3 foot, | } of good
14-ounce tin; |
| (b) <i>Octava</i> 2 foot, | |
| (c) <i>Schalemoy</i> [= <i>Schalmei, chalumeau</i>]
8 foot, | |
| (d) <i>Mixture</i> , three ranks, | |
| (e) <i>Tertia</i> , with which, by drawing a few other stops, one can produce a fine and complete <i>Sesquialtera</i> ; | |
| (f) <i>Fleute douce</i> 4 foot: and finally a | |
| (g) <i>Stillgedacht</i> 8 foot, which accords perfectly with concerted music and, | |

important; it just lies at the top. The most important stops, with which one may improvise in full polyphony, are in the *Werk*; and so on."

From this we see that the terminology was by no means uniform or clear. Adlung states that the *Oberwerk* lies at the top; but in the sentence immediately preceding he has explained that at St. Stephen's in Bremen the second of three manuals is called the *Oberwerk*. Very roughly, *Hauptwerk* or *das Werk* may be said to correspond to our Great, *Brust* or *Brustwerk* to our Swell (but without the shutters that give that department its name), and *Rückpositiv* to our Choir.

made of good wood, should sound much better than a metal *Gedackt*.

(11) Between the manuals of this *Brustpositiv* and the *Oberwerck* there must be a coupler.

And finally, in addition to a complete tuning of the whole organ, the tremulant must be regulated so that it flutters at the proper rate.