

Re: BWV 898

Präludium und Fuge B-dur

Source: NBA KB V/12 pp. 223-226 (Bärenreiter 2006)

Discussion by Frieder Rempp

This work is not by J. S. Bach. It has not been reproduced in NBA V/12 as printed music.

A single manuscript copy from the second half of the 18th century is the earliest document available. All other copies and printed music of it come from the 19th century. The NBA KB discusses the differences between all the different sources.

The first printed edition of this work appeared in an edition by Peters 4, pp. 23-27 in 1839 and Peters 4a, Anhang pp. 22-25 in 1843/44. Friedrich Konrad Griepenkerl commented as follows in the Peters 4a edition:

In order to avoid the appearance of supporting this work as genuinely by J. S. Bach (there are no exterior or interior reasons supporting this contention), it was placed this time in this reissue in the appendix, so that the purchasers of this volume would not have to do without finding this work which they may have come to love.

The critical voice regarding this composition is very likely that of Johann Nikolaus Forkel who, in 1810, wrote to the Leipzig publishing firm Hoffmeister und Kühnel, that was preparing to publish Bach's keyboard works:

The Fugue on Bach's Name which you have sent to me for consideration is definitely not a work by J. S. Bach. You should not dishonor a collection of his works with such a common, schoolmasterly effort.

In the same letter Forkel mentions that he has already received at least 20 such fugues on B-A-C-H that have been described as 'great musical rarities'.

In contrast to Forkel and Griepenkerl, Philipp Spitta is the only Bach expert who thought that he saw indications that this might have been a youthful work from the early Weimar period. All other experts since Spitta's time have brought forth various arguments against Bach's authorship. One might have to agree with Griepenkerl that externally the provenance of the sources for this work are highly questionable. Internally (stylistically) the only characteristics that might point into the direction of J. S. Bach are the use of the French overture in the Präludium and the virtuosic insertion at the end of the fugue, but the latter was commonplace among many masters of the North German style. Frieder Rempp suspects that the almost too frequent use of parallel thirds and sequential structures might be closer to the style exhibited in the A minor Fugue BWV 897/2. This along with the idiosyncratic final statement of the fugal subject in octaves would point more in the direction of Johann Christoph Kellner (1736-1803) as the possible composer of BWV 898.