

einem tiefen, schwer erforschten Grund ruhe, auch von diesem immer schwer auszusprechenden Grunde das Mögliche mit heraufzunehmen trachte."<sup>22</sup>) Diese Gründlichkeit ist mit der "Gründlichkeit religiöser Musik" bei Bach verwandt. Man muß nicht Goethe und sein Zeitalter überspringen, um Bach zu verstehen. Haben jene Musiker und Denker in jeder Hinsicht weniger von ihm gewußt als wir, denen alle hinterlassenen Werke Bachs in Gesamtausgaben zur Verfügung stehen?

### *Bach's Place in the World-view of the Goethe Era*

Bach's presence in the consciousness of a cultural élite cannot be ascribed to a period so remote as his own lifetime or so late as 1829; in fact it dates from about 1800. "The revolving wheel of Fortune," says Friedrich Rochlitz, "on which Sebastian Bach, the revered father, had for a while been very low, brought him up again—up to the highest point, indeed, albeit for a brief moment. That moment occurred about the year 1800." The same important writer, whom Goethe knew and valued highly, later declares that "so many penetrating, true, and worthwhile writings" have appeared concerning Bach "that even those persons who do not occupy themselves with him and his works must needs possess at least the outlines of both in their minds."<sup>1</sup> In 1811 Hans Georg Nägeli calls Bach the "greatest of all composers."<sup>2</sup> Forkel judges him "the prime classic."<sup>3</sup> Goethe, in a letter to Zelter, uses an expression mainly applicable to the head of an order like that of the Freemasons: "your Grand Master."<sup>4</sup> A. B. Marx, in 1828, is exuberant in his praise of the St. Matthew Passion, "the greatest work of our greatest master, the greatest and holiest work in the music of all nations."<sup>5</sup> E. T. A. Hoffmann speaks of that "powerful genius, Sebastian Bach,"<sup>6</sup> and Hegel of his "magnificent . . . geniality [*Genialität*]."<sup>7</sup> He was compared to Dürer and Michelangelo, Shakespeare and Newton, Dante and Homer.

Goethe's era saw him primarily within the context of an aesthetic world-view, not, as does historicism, within that of a detailed historical conception. He was considered a classical representative of significant ideas. Thus K. C. F. Krause, the original philosopher whose Spanish adherents made up the trend known as "Krausismo," calls him "a splendid example and model of free and bold part-writing."<sup>8</sup>

Schubart characterizes Bach as "original,"<sup>9</sup> Goethe as "fundamentally original,"<sup>10</sup> an epithet suggestive of characteristic personal traits and independence, as well as of innovative creativeness. "One comes upon such bold modulations," says Schubart, "so grand a harmony, such novel melodic passages, that it is impossible not to recognize the original genius of a Bach."<sup>10a</sup> "Original" also contains the idea of primordialism, of derivation from sources more universal than historical influences and fashions.

The concept of "linear counterpoint" in Bach was current already then. Forkel points to the "interweaving of several melodies, all of which are so singable that each can, and actually does, appear in the uppermost part."<sup>11</sup> Rochlitz stresses that with Bach "each part is treated freely (is 'real,' as they say) and melodiously, each, as it were, sings its own song; yet in the aggregate they form a single, tightly-knit whole."<sup>12</sup> Carl Maria von Weber says, "The greatness of his works, as regards harmony, springs from the adroitness of his mental powers, which enable him to link together the most contradictory melodic lines into a unified whole."<sup>13</sup>

Thoughts such as these were articulated by musical experts and expatiated upon by universal thinkers. Thus Bach was extolled for having combined freedom in the single parts with harmonic cohesion and by the same token freedom of artistic imagination with the logical consistency of harmony. Rochlitz underlines that "in Bach's most perfect works everything seems inevitable (as if it could not be fashioned otherwise without harming the whole) and at the same time free (each component seemingly self-determined)."<sup>14</sup> Hegel carries the thought further. He begins by observing that in Bach's compositions "different melodies are [often] harmonically intertwined, so that the juncture of specific notes in these melodies always" produces a chord. When this is the procedure, he goes on to say, deeper music ought not to dwell at length on consonances. "On the contrary, it ought to break up the simple initial concord into dissonances. The boldness of the musical composition abandons merely consonant progressions, moves forward to antitheses, calls forth the strongest contradictions and dissonances, and displays its own might while unearthing all the forces of harmony, whose conflicts it is then just as sure of allaying, thus celebrating the satisfying victory of melodic reconciliation. It is a struggle

between freedom and necessity; a struggle between the imagination's freedom to abandon itself to its own sway and the necessity of those harmonic relationships which it requires for its expression and in which lies its own significance."<sup>15</sup>

What later composers were to admire in Bach was to some extent already formulated in Goethe's time. Schumann emphasized his "deeply combinative" quality; but Rochlitz anticipates him when he points to Bach's "profound combinative gift,"<sup>16</sup> an expression allusive not only to the combination of parts in harmonic polyphony but to that of rhythms, of chords, of closely related and distant keys. Bach was honored for his pure music, as against music clouded over with sentiment or programmatic content; pure music was also differentiated from music that stressed national styles and tended to self-portrayal. With Bach, says Zelter, "it is all music, and nothing else; not German, not Italian, simply music."<sup>17</sup>

It is misleading to assume that the Romantic period's relation to music was always characterized by a surrender to feeling and a rejection of intellect. Connoisseurs realized even then that ingenious music, such as Bach's fugues, required intelligent listening. Rochlitz is quite emphatic when he says, "His works mean very little to the man who prefers not to think while enjoying art; he will never absorb, let alone discover, their essence and excellence. . . . Most of all, [Bach] stimulates and engages the intellect. Not," he adds, "the cold and dry but the lively, susceptible, penetrating intellect."<sup>18</sup> Empty, meaningless music, according to Hegel, cannot be considered art, for it lacks a principal aspect of all art: content and expression.<sup>19</sup> The purely musical structure of a work rises to the level of true art only through the "spirit inherent in its architecture."<sup>20</sup> To have "spirit," here, is to be not only ingenious and *plein d'esprit*, but *spirituelle* as well. E. T. A. Hoffmann points to the "spirit" in Bach's manner of composing variations,<sup>21</sup> surely with particular reference to the Goldberg Variations.

At the time, it was a fundamental concept that, while sculpture had reached its greatest perfection and meaningfulness during Greek antiquity, music had only done so in the modern period of Western civilization. "Sculpture," says Hegel, "reaches its highest pinnacle at the hands of the Greeks and Romans in the ancient world, just as do painting and music in more recent times at the hands of the Christian peoples."<sup>22</sup> He goes on to say that

only Western Christianity, and no other epoch or culture, had developed a "fundamental sacred music." In this context "fundamental" implies substantive solidity (as when one speaks of a fundamental scientific treatise) as well as penetration into the depths of the soul and the appropriate expression of what lies there. "This fundamental sacred music," says Hegel, "is among the deepest and most effective products art can bring forth."<sup>196</sup> In Hegel's world-view, therefore, it occupies the same high rank as the sculpture of Phidias, the poetry of Dante, the drama of Shakespeare. Which masters and which works of sacred music did Hegel have in mind? First, the great tradition of Catholic liturgical music, whose central figure, as it appeared at this time, was Palestrina. But then he points out that the Protestants, too, created such music: works having "great depth of religious feeling as well as musical substance, abundant in inventiveness and craftsmanship; as for example, above all others, Sebastian Bach, a master whose magnificent, genuinely Protestant, vigorous yet at the same time erudite geniality [*Genialität*] has only recently begun to be fully appreciated again."<sup>196</sup>

Elsewhere I have offered an interpretation of Goethe's most famous dictum on Bach, made in 1827.<sup>20</sup> The conception of eternal harmony in the cosmos and before the Creation goes back to old traditions, especially to Kepler's *Harmonice mundi* (1619), a book that also influenced Bach by way of Werckmeister. Athanasius Kircher spoke of the *harmonia nascentis mundi*; God had created the world as a monumental world-organ.<sup>21</sup>

Goethe described himself as a mystic in his old age; but he never blurred the boundaries separating the knowledge that comes of experience from rapturous mysticism. "It makes a great difference . . . , whether, when clarity no longer suits me, I endeavor to wrap myself in a certain obscurity, or whether, convinced that clarity is based in deep, recondite ground, I endeavor to evoke whatever I can from that ground, which in any case is all but ineffable."<sup>22</sup> This fundamentality is related to the "fundamental sacred music" of Bach.

One must not skip over Goethe and his era in order to understand Bach. Did those musicians and thinkers know so much less about him, in every respect, than do we, who have at our disposal complete editions of all his extant works?

(Translated by Piero Weiss)

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung (AMZ)* (1831) 33:265; also *Wage zu Bach* edited by J. Müller-Blattau (Augsburg, 1926), p. 27.

<sup>2</sup> *AMZ* (1811) 13:662.

<sup>3</sup> J. N. Forkel, *Über Johann Sebastian Bachs Leben, Kunst und Kunstwerke* edited by J. Müller-Blattau (Kassel, 1950), p. 13.

<sup>4</sup> Goethe, *Briefentwurf* of June 21, 1827.

<sup>5</sup> *Berliner Allgemeine Musikzeitung* (1828) 5:131f.; also M. Geck, *Die Widerständigkeit der Matheuspassion im 19. Jahrhundert* (Regensburg, 1967), p. 23.

<sup>6</sup> E. T. A. Hoffmann, *Musikalische Novellen und Anekdoten* edited by E. Isel, vol. 1 (Regensburg, n.d.), p. 91.

<sup>7</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Ästhetik* (Berlin, 1955), p. 859.

<sup>8</sup> G. Scharda, *Ästhetik und Musiktheorie des Philosophen Karl Chr. Fr. Krause* (Münster, 1932), p. 180.

<sup>9</sup> C. D. F. Schubert, *Ideen zu einer Ästhetik der Tonkunst* (Vienna, 1806).

<sup>10</sup> Goethe, Letter of April 22, 1827.

<sup>11</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 100.

<sup>12</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 41.

<sup>13</sup> *AMZ* (1803) 5:516; *Wage zu Bach*, p. 14.

<sup>14</sup> C. M. von Weber, *Sämmtliche Schriften* edited by G. Kaiser (Berlin and Leipzig, 1908), p. 342.

<sup>15</sup> *AMZ* (1803) 5:514-15.

<sup>16</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 844.

<sup>17</sup> *AMZ* (1831) 33:265ff.; *Wage zu Bach*, p. 47.

<sup>18</sup> Zelter, Letter of April 8, 1827.

<sup>19</sup> *AMZ* (1803) 5:509ff.; *Wage zu Bach*, p. 9ff.

<sup>20</sup> Hegel, *op. cit.*, p. 817.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 803.

<sup>22</sup> E. T. A. Hoffmann, *Schriften zur Musik* (Munich, 1963), p. 251.

<sup>23</sup> Hegel, *op. cit.*, p. 882.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 859.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 859.

<sup>26</sup> W. Wiora, "Goethes Wort über Bach," *Hans Albert in Memoriam* (Kassel, 1962), p. 179.

<sup>27</sup> R. Dammann, *Der Musikbegriff im deutschen Barock* (Cologne, 1967), p. 416.

<sup>28</sup> Goethe, "Zur Morphologie," Weimar edition II/6, p. 354.