

A Kalmus Classic Edition

Johann Sebastian

BACH

COMPLETE ORGAN WORKS

IN NINE VOLUMES

VOLUME II

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Kalmus

Preface to the First Edition

(condensation)

FOR ALL NINE VOLUMES

IT IS unfortunate that the organ works of J. S. Bach are available to us only in a few widely dispersed manuscripts. The autographs of many works have been completely lost. The few works printed were prepared with inadequate critical precision—with the rare exception of those works which were copper-engraved in Bach's own time. In attempting to present an authentic text the editor has to plow through the maze of alterations and errors in script which are so abundant in the various inaccurate manuscripts. These are often difficult to unravel, even though one may have had many years of experience in studying Bach's handwriting. However, this seems to be a propitious time for the presentation of the organ works of J. S. Bach, especially if we can secure the kind co-operation of all the living Bach-scholars in clearing up some of the problematic passages.

However, an accurate text can serve only as a means to an end; for the expression of the text in actual sound requires recreative art of imagination and ability. The greatest clarity is needed in performing Bach's works for the organ. For the attainment of such clarity there are four means at our disposal: 1. The correct separation of the independent parts through appropriate phrasing in each voice—combined with an observance of strict legato within each continuous section. 2. An elastic touch—which prevents the excessive holding of any tone within a melodic line and yet makes a true, smooth legato possible. 3. Great thought and care in the matter of registration. 4. Choice of a tempo appropriate to the mood of the composition as well as to the registration planned by the performer.

1. In order to give a clear presentation of the various contrapuntal parts it is necessary for the performer to possess a thorough knowledge of fugal structure, so that he can analyze the work correctly to the minutest detail. Only then will he know how to plan the interpunctuations in the phrasing correctly. One might also mention at this point that the final note of a phrase is frequently abbreviated, i.e. it is not sustained as long as its actual note-value may indicate.

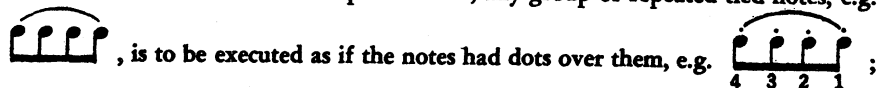
2. The second means at our disposal for the attainment of clarity, i.e. an elastic touch, can be described fairly accurately as a result of three detailed expositions of Bach's manual approach at keyboard instruments: K.P.E. Bach's "Essay on the true way of playing the klavier" (1753), Forkel's "Life, art and works of J. S. Bach" (1802), and my own introduction to the Chromatic Fantasia (1819). Bach believed in contacting with the finger only the key which begins a given phrase, the other fingers remaining contracted and at ease—to avoid unnecessary tension. The finger holding down the key acts as an easy support for the forearm until the next note is played. Then the weight is transferred to the finger playing the next note; the previous finger immediately releases its note and is at once relaxed—and not kept rigidly over the previous note. In this procedure the upper arm and the rest of the body remain at perfect ease. All tension in the hand is avoided. Contemporaries of J. S. Bach have always described his organ-playing as being completely effortless. Some of them ascribed to him a gigantic

power, merely because he played with great ease what others played with great effort. A description of Bach's pedal-technic appears in Kittel's excellent work: "Four-voice Chorales, with Preludes" (Altona 1803). Three methods of using the pedals are cited: (1) playing with the front of the foot, alternating right and left, (2) alternating the front and the heel of the same foot, (3) a mixture of (1) and (2). In our opinion, the performer must choose whichever method of pedalling suits him best.

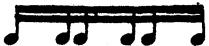
3. The matter of registration is extremely important in performing Bach's works correctly, beautifully and clearly. One must fully understand the use of the stops and all their possible combinations. Bach does not give us a clear explanation of his precise meaning in the expression, "organo pleno." While using all the tonal possibilities of the organ, one must, nevertheless, not interpret the expression too literally; for the various works marked "organo pleno" cannot be performed with the same registration. One must also remember never to sacrifice clarity for mere power.


4. The fourth requisite for the attainment of clarity is the selection of a tempo appropriate to the style and registration of the composition. One should avoid too fast a tempo, resulting in the blurring of louder tones—the tonal result being comparable to a misuse of the damper pedal on the piano. The indication "organo pleno" always implies a broader tempo. We shall offer specific suggestions for the tempi of various compositions in the prefatory notes pertaining to these works.

A list of ornaments and their execution is given on the page with the table of contents in each volume. There are two matters of notation that we should like to elucidate at this point. First, any group of repeated tied notes, e.g.



the best fingering for such passages is the alternation of different fingers on the same note. Secondly, against three triplets of 16th notes Bach sometimes writes

six ordinary 16th notes, , and sometimes dotted 16ths and

32nds as follows  in both instances they are to be played in the same manner, i.e. the first note is held for the duration of two triplet sixteenth-notes, the second note is held for the duration of the third sixteenth-note in the triplet—etc. etc.

The tempo indications—Largo, Adagio, Andante, Allegro, Vivace, etc.—have to be interpreted in their old connotation. Allegro means jolly, Vivace means lively, the Adagio is not as slow as in our own time. In Andante, quarter-notes are played approximately at the same speed as in the old Menuet. However, Largo does mean "very slow".