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Schutz and the Organ

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The year 1985 marks the anniversaries of four celebrated Baroque musicians. Three of them—Scarlatti, Handel and Bach—belong to the late Baroque and were renowned during their time as keyboard virtuosos. The fourth, Heinrich Schütz (1585–1672), belongs to the early Baroque, and his relation to the keyboard is neither so clear nor so recognized. Although Schütz was never acclaimed as a keyboard virtuoso, he was indeed an accomplished organist and remained in close contact with that instrument throughout his long career.

While it is possible that Schütz had already begun keyboard training as a student in Weissenfels, the early formation of his keyboard technique must have taken place for the most part in Kassel during his 13th to his 22nd year at the Collegium Mauritianum, the superb court school supported by the Landgrave Moritz of Hesse. Especially after his voice changed, Schütz seems to have devoted his energy to the mastery of various instruments, this at the prompting of the Landgrave, who was a strong supporter of music and was himself an organist.1 The Landgrave regarded this training as good cultural formation and as a prudent preparation for future employment.2 Schütz’s organ study also laid an excellent foundation for the study of choral composition, since much organ repertoire at this time still consisted of intabulations (made by organists themselves) of chorale works;

in this regard, Giovanni Gabrieli and Hans Leo Hassler come to mind, both of whom were organists by profession, but gained great fame as composers of choral music.

After a brief stint as a law student at the University of Marburg, Schütz departed for Venice in 1609 to study composition with Giovanni Gabrieli, having again received generous encouragement and financial support from Landgrave Moritz. Schütz’s apprenticeship lasted until Gabrieli’s death in 1612. Although the young German never mentioned anything but his study of composition, a contemporary report mentioned Schütz’s progress both in composition and performance, and the clergyman Georg Weisse in a poem accompanying Schütz’s funeral sermon suggested that Gabrieli allowed Schütz to deputize for him in his post as organist of San Marco.4

By German standards the organs at San Marco were quite modest. The second organ was an instrument of four ranks. The first organ’s specification is given by Johann Mattheson in his Der vollkommene Capellmeister of 1739:5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stop</th>
<th>Pipes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sub-Principal Bass</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Octava</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decimana</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quintadecima</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vicesimasecunda</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vicesimasesta</td>
<td>1½</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vicesimananta</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flauto</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(possibly a mistake for 4', since Mattheson describes this stop as a "superoctava")

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By Italian standards this instrument was quite large, and much admired.8

That a German Protestant from a secular court should apprentice himself to an Italian Roman Catholic who was organist of the Basilica of San Marco was nothing unusual or surprising. The unified musical language prevailing everywhere in Europe during the 16th century knew no distinction between Catholic and Protestant, or between sacred and secular. This uniformity held as true for organ music as it did for other musical genres; there were various musical dialects, roughly corresponding to linguistic differences, but one musical practice everywhere. During Schütz’s formative years, the center of new developments in this practice was increasingly perceived to be Italy. German composers of the generation before Schütz had already journeyed to Italy to study (e.g., Hassler) or had adopted the Italian style (e.g., Praetorius). The court of the Elector of Saxony at Dresden, where Schütz was to spend most of his career, was a place where Italian influence penetrated most deeply into Germany; Hassler and Praetorius were both briefly in the employ of this court.

From 1614 on, Schütz was active at the Dresden court in the employ of the Elector of Saxony, Johann Georg I (he was finally designated Kapellmeister in 1619, but an earlier document referred to him as “organist and musical director”).9 Before arriving in Dresden, however, Schütz for a brief time held the post of organ and court organist at Landgrave Moritz’s court in Kassel. Given the facts that Schütz never spoke of himself as an organist, never seems to have written any organ music, and gained no lasting fame as an organist, why did the Landgrave appoint him to this post? It may be, as Moser suggested,8 that we are to view this appointment as largely formal. More to the point, however, Schütz’s organ playing at Kassel needs to be understood in light of the two basic roles assigned to the organ at this time.

These two roles were the same both in Italy and in Germany and can be seen most clearly in the examination required of candidates for the post of organist of San Marco, Venice. First, the contestant was asked to read a movement of a mass or a motet from open score, not only maintaining the original contrapuntal texture throughout, but embellishing individual voices as the occasion presented itself. Second, he was given a plainsong cantus firmus on which he had to improvise a four-voice piece of imitative counterpoint featuring the cantus firmus successively in the bass, tenor, alt and soprano. Finally, he was required to improvise various alternations in the choir, displaying his ability to improvise both freely and also on the themes appropriate to the work the choir was singing.9 There were, then, two skills expected of an accomplished organist: first, the ability to accompany a choir by reading open score (and adding tasteful embellishments to the choral parts) and second, skill at improvising, both freely and on a cantus firmus. There is every reason to think that Schütz mastered these skills, both of which place greater emphasis on musicianship than on virtuosity. As court organist at Kassel (and perhaps also during his early years at Dresden), he would have had to play introductions to polyphonic choral pieces and accompany them, and also improvise on chants and German chorales.

ACCOMPANYING SINGERS

The performance of choral music had been accompanied by the organ long before the presence of a basso continuo line unequivocally betrayed its presence.10 With the dawn of the Baroque era, the age of the basso continuo, accompaniment by a keyboard instrument (in church music, principally the organ) became an indispensable feature of choral music. All of Schütz’s publications of choral works include a basso continuo part,11 and he mentioned the basso continuo a number of times in the prefaces.

In the preface to the Psalmen Davids (1619) Schütz made the distinction between more modern works, in which the basso continuo is indispensable, and motets with a full texture, which the organist should write out in score:

*Der Basso continuo ist eigentlich nur für die Psalmen gemeint / von der Motet an: Ist nicht Ephraim / bis zum Beschluss dess operis werden sich fleissige Organisten mit absetzen in die Partituren bemühen! …*12

The basso continuo is actually intended only for the Psalms. Beginning with the motet “Ist nicht Ephraim” until the end of the collection conscientious organists will take the trouble to write the work in score …

Similar injunctions that the organist write out the work and play it from score are found in the prefaces to the collections of stile antico, motet-like works: the Cantiones sacrae and the Geistliche Chormusik.13 In the Psalmen Davids preface Schütz also expressed concern for proper organ registration:

*… Derowegen dann der Organist diese terminos, wie sie im Basso continuo zu finden / in acht nemen / und die Orgel mit guter discretion, bald still bald stark registrieren wolle.*14

(Having discussed the distinction between the Coro Favorito (the soloists) and the Capella, Schütz continued) … Therefore, then, the organist will want to take note of these terms as they appear in the basso continuo, and register the organ with due discretion, at times quietly, at times loudly.

Just as Italian organists were expected to add embellishments to the score or continuo, so German organists were expected to enliven the performance in this way.14 For the performance of the continuo, Schütz suggested either a large organ or a positive, as well as other instruments such as the lute or pandora.15

The special requirements of polyphonic music made it necessary to employ more than one organist for the performance of the basso continuo, as Schütz’s memorandum to Count Posthumus of Reuss concerning the establishment of music at his court in Gera shows:

_Buer Gn. seind nothwendig bey solchem weitleuffigen, fürnemen Corpore musico zwey Organisten zum geringsten von­nöthen, dann do mit vielen Cohren etwas soll musiciert werden, müssen die Organisten das Fundament halten, das auch bey einem jeden Chor sich fast ein eigner Organist gebühre. Jedoch können zwey Organisten, welche e diametro einander über, die nebstebystehende Chor mit ihrer Orgel oder Regal begleiten, das disvhal das Fundament alzeit in der Kirchen gehör werden kann._17

For such an extensive and distinguished musical establishment, Your Grace will find necessary a minimum of two organists, for when something is to be performed with many choirs, the organists must maintain the foundation, so that each choir really ought to have its own organist. However, two organists, placed diametrically opposite each other, can accompany the choir standing nearest them with their organ or regal, so that in this case the foundation can be heard in the church at all times.

The Dresden Kantorei began in 1548 with one organist, but by 1555 the number had grown to three; this seems to have been the optimum number except in times of hardship.18 Multiple organists also permitted the rotation of duties so that the heavy schedule of chapel services did not have to become onerous.

The account of the Reformation festival of 1617, written by the court preacher Hoe von Honegg,19 listed among the contributing musicians three organists and three organ choir boys.20 These apprentice organists were apparently given instruction in music and composition by Schütz, but trained as organists by the court organists. This system produced significant organists, among them Johannes Vierdanck, later organist of the Marienkirche at Stralsund, and Matthias Weckmann.

SOLO ORGAN IMPROVISATION

Undertaking the leadership of the prestigious Dresden Hofkantorei offered Schütz the opportunity to devote himself entirely to composition and conducting. Yet as late as
1619 he performed as an organ recitalist at the dedication of the new organ at the Bayreuth Stadtkirche, acquitting himself well (according to a contemporary account), even in comparison with Praetorius and Samuel Scheidt, who also performed in the recital. This performance strongly suggests that Schütz had the ability to improvise both freely and on a cantus firmus, the second skill expected of an accomplished organist.

Contrapuntal organ improvisation on a cantus firmus is perhaps the oldest type of solo organ music. The manifold and varied use of the organ as a solo instrument in the early 17th-century Lutheran liturgy was the outgrowth of a rich tradition, based on the use of the organ to alternate with or replace the choir in the later medieval Roman Catholic liturgy, and further enhanced by all the musical possibilities of the Lutheran chorale. In Lutheran Germany the prevailing practice throughout the 16th and 17th centuries allowed the organ, depending on the particular locale, to introduce a motet or hymn, to alternate with choir and/or congregation, or even to entirely replace various musical items in the liturgy. During the 16th century the organist's duties also came to include preludes and postludes to the liturgy and quiet pieces during the elevation and communion. All this organ music might be improvised, but with the passing of time pieces were committed to paper, such as intabulations of choral works, organ versus on chants and chorales (e.g., Scheidt's Tabulatura Nova of 1624), and free works (e.g., ricercars, canzonas and toccatas by composers such as Gabrieli and Hassler).

ORGAN MUSIC AT THE DRESDEN COURT

Although Schütz seems to have relinquished organ performance soon after assuming the post of Kapellmeister at Dresden, nevertheless the various court organists were directly under his supervision, and he not only heard their performances, but undoubtedly interested himself in their activities as well.

The Electors of Saxony and their court at Dresden were distinguished by a conspicuous piety, intensified by the Thirty Years War, that manifested itself in frequent and varied court liturgies. During the reign of Johann Georg I (1611-56), these included morning preaching services (on Wednesdays and Fridays) and vespers, liturgies on Sundays and festival days, and the introduction of intercessory prayer services (on Sundays, Wednesdays and Fridays). Sunday liturgies, vespers and festival days were particularly liable to be celebrated with elaborate figural music performed by the Kantorei (Kapelle), but it appears that all the liturgies enjoyed at least the services of an organist (except for the services of the organist of the collapse of the Kantorei, caused by the depredations of the Thirty Years War). The Dresden Hofkantorei was from its inception in 1548 dedicated chiefly to collaboration in the court liturgies, and only secondarily to secular music. In the course of time, especially in the 17th century, music for the liturgical cursus came to be overshadowed by large musical productions for ceremonial occasions; yet, even these frequently took the form of elaborate liturgies (e.g., the 1617 Reformation festival chronicled by Hoe von Honegg).

This constant liturgical activity offered manifold opportunities for organ performance: preludes and postludes, introits (Gregorian chants, Latin and German hymns), de tempore chorales, Psalms (from the Becker Psalter, the official court psalter, with most of the tunes and harmonizations by Schütz), chorales at the gradual and before and after the sermon. The fact that the court during the 17th century still favored the traditional corpus of 16th-century Lutheran hymnody suggests that it also retained the rich and varied 16th-century alternatim practice that allowed a wide scope of solo contributions by court organists.

Most of the Dresden court organists were of no more than local significance; a number, however, were distinguished enough to merit wider acclaim. Hans Leo Hassler, under whose guidance Gottfried Fritzsche built the great court organ (finished 1612-14), was court organist 1608-12. During Schütz's active tenure as Kapellmeister (1615-57) outstanding organists included:

Johann Klemm (court organist 1625-c.1651), composer as well as organist, who studied organ with Christian Erbach and composition with Schütz;
Anton Colander (court organist c. 1616-21), a composer of vocal concerti as well as an organist; and
Matthias Weckmann (court organist, with several interruptions, 1641-55). Of the three organists mentioned, Weckmann is by far the most significant. Trained as a choirboy in the rudiments of music and in composition by Schütz, he was nevertheless an organ student of Johann Klemm. Schütz, noting the boy's talent for music and his fleet fingers, petitioned the elector in 1633 to send him to Hamburg to study with the Sweelinck student, Jacob Praetorius. After serving under Schütz in the Dresden Kantorei, Weckmann was called to the post of organist at the Jacobikirche in Hamburg in 1655. Mattheson's story about a contest between Weckmann and Froberger on the court chapel organ (to whatever degree it is accurate) reveals the prestige such an artist enjoyed at the court. Beyond any contributions he made to the court liturgies, either as a continuo player or solo improviser, his virtuosity seems to have been regarded as a peculiar court treasure, and his performances probably were valued at least as much for pious entertainment as for their adornment of the liturgy.

The years of Schütz's tenure as Dresden saw the introduction of yet another duty for the court organist, in addition to continuo and solo improvisation: the accompaniment of congregational singing on the organ. It is not possible to pinpoint the date when this practice began, but the circumstantial evidence for it is convincing. The first edition of Schütz's Becker Psalter (1628) was published in four parts. For the second edition, published in 1661 (still in parts), Schütz provided a special partbook for the basso continuo. The complete change to a "General-bass-Gesangbuch" with treble melody and figured bass did not occur, however, until 1676 (four years after Schütz's death), with the printing of the Dresdener Gesangbuch.

DRESDEN COURT ORGANS

There were in the course of years a number of court chapel organs upon which organists could discharge their duties. In 1563 the organbuilder Herman Rodenstein (Hermann Rottenstein-Pock), a Netherlander who settled in Zwickau, Saxony, constructed a new organ of 14 stops for the court church; this organ probably stood on the organ balcony behind the high altar.

Prinzipale [4]
Gedackte [6]
Quintadehne [8]
Octave [2]
Zimbels (Scharf) [6]
Querpfeiffe [4]
Gemenshörner [2]
Sufflet [1½]
Trommetten [6]
Krumhörner [6 or 4]
Regal [8]
Kleine Flüttlein [1]
Tremulanten
Mistur

With the construction of a new organ in 1612, this organ was moved to the balcony opposite the altar (and new organ). It was apparently repaired during the 1620s and thereafter was used for weekday services. Unfortunately, Hans Leo Hassler died before playing the new organ that Gottfried Fritzsche completed according to Hassler's instructions. This new organ replaced the old one
on the balcony behind the high altar. Its specification survives, interestingly enough, in two forms: a draft of 1612 by Hassler, and a printed stop list in Volume II of Praetorius’s Syntagma Musicum (1619).

Hassler’s “special pedal registers” appear to be available in the pedal by transmission from the positive. According to Praetorius, Fritzsche omitted these, providing instead a positive/pedal coupler and two high pedal stops. Both Hassler and Praetorius agree upon the compass and configuration of the manual and pedal keyboards, the manuals having two suboctaves per octave:

- Manual (53 keys): CF G A Bc d e f g a b etc. to d3
- Pedal (23 keys): CF G A Bc d e f g a bc d1

Despite occasional repairs, this instrument seems to have remained basically unchanged throughout the 17th century, even after the major renovation of the court chapel in 1662.

During this renovation new choir balconies were added in front of the organ balcony, and on these were placed two new positive organs. This is the condition in which we see the organ and chapel in the engraving of Schütz and the Hofkantorei done by David Conrad for Christoph Bernhard’s Geistreiches Gesangbuch of 1676 (see illustration on page 68).

In 1737 the Lutheran court chapel services were removed to the Sophienkirche (the Elector Friedrich August I having converted to Roman Catholicism in 1697) and the organ was given to the new Matthäikirche in Dresden-Friedrichstadt. Here it remained in use until 1861, by which time it had become unplayable. The church got a new organ, and the Fritzsche case was placed in a museum, where it was destroyed in the Allied bombing of Dresden in 1945.

Gottfried Fritzsche (1578-1638) was one of the most famous and significant German organbuilders of the 17th century: his instruments eventually became prototypes for the work of such masters as Arp Schnitger, after his removal to Hamburg in 1629. His instrument for the Dresden court chapel,
After 1619 we hear no more of Schütz as an organist. Yet he counted among his friends organists far removed from his colleagues in Dresden: Johannes Zahn, organist of the Marktkirche at Magdeburg, whom Schütz staunchly supported in a salary dispute with the church council; Delphin Strungk, organist of the Marienkirche at Braunschweig, for whose third child he stood as godfather in 1645; and Martin Knabe, organist at Weissenfels, Schütz’s hometown. Even long after his retirement, we find Schütz in his 78th year advising Moritz, Duke of Saxony, concerning the establishment of a Kapelle at his palace in Zeitz and suggesting the acquisition of a positive in terms that leave little doubt as to Schütz’s intimate familiarity with the organ:

Wegen des von mir vorgeschlagenen neuen Positifs beydes in der Kirche an stadt der Orgel, und auch zu hoffe zu gebrauchen.

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Das desselbigen Verfertigung von Ihrer Fürstl. Durchl. dem Orgelmacher. Jedoch: dem Orgelmacher solches bey allen und der Musick zum fundament mit gebraucht müste werden, undt daher der Orgelmacher, bei litiger aufseufzung der grossen Orgel dassellige zu gleich bey ihn mit machen solte. Den auffsetz wegen des Claviers, item der Register und bequemen zum forttragen in zweyen stücken, habe Ich dem Capellmeister vorher zugesichten, wofür der Orgelmacher sich denn zu richten, und widersolche Auffsetz mit gantzer breifung und berathschlagung hiroben derogestalt auf-gezeichnet worden, Und demnach mehrgedachtetre Orgelmacher aus der Alten Orgell, Ein stark pfeifferwerk aus der Brust (wie Sie es husszen) zu sich genommen und dassellige zu seinem grossen Vorthell in Einer anderer gemeine Kirche wiederumb ver-handeln kann, als sehe Ich gar nicht, wie solche Newe positiff Er hoch werde schätzen können, zumal auch in dassellige nicht mehr als nur 4 Register (uber welche auch zu Einer vollständigen Musick, mehr nicht vonnothen sind;) hierin gebracht werden sollen.

An organ such as this, with its variety of piquant tonal possibilities, was well suited for soloing out cantus firmi as well as for the juxtaposition of sharply contrasting timbres—in short, for the performance of works such as those Samuel Scheidt published in his Tabulatura Nova. It is no longer possible for us to experience its gravity, but its color is well represented today in the large chamber organ built c.1630 by the central German master organbuilder and contemporary of Gottfried Fritzsche, Esaias Compenius, presently in the castle at Frederiksborg, Denmark.
the instrument? There may be many partial answers to this question; surely one of them stems from the requirements of his position in Dresden (like J.S. Bach a century later, who wrote relatively little organ music in Cöthen and Leipzig, where he was not employed as an organist). Furthermore, Schütz seems not to have been a keyboard virtuoso and was obviously by preference a composer of sacred choral music. Finally, at this time in central Germany (as in Italy) the organ played a somewhat secondary role, generally speaking, in music making. No musician of Schütz's generation made a name for himself primarily as an organist except Samuel Scheidt, and he was trained, not in Italy, but in the north, in Amsterdam under Sweelinck. If we consider this secondary status of the organ, perhaps we can understand why Matthias Weckmann left Dresden in 1655 (shortly before Schütz's complete retirement from active service) and moved to Hamburg to assume the position of organist at the Jacobikirche—to the north, where musical taste and circumstances brought about the major cultivation of organ music during the 17th century.

NOTES
2. Ibid., p. 42.
7. Rifkin, op. cit., p. 5.
8. Moser, op. cit., p. 82.
10. The 1555 regulations for the Dresden Kantorei required the organist on duty to inquire of the Kapellmeister what mass or motet was to be performed, in order to practice the accompaniment for it. See Eberhard Schmidt, Der Gottesdienst am Kurfürstlichen Hofe zu Dresden (Göttingen: Vandeboeck & Ruprecht [1981]), p. 177.
11. With the exception of the early and unaccompanied Italian Madrigals.
12. Schütz, op. cit., p. 64.
13. Ibid., pp. 78 and 196.
20. Perhaps the same sort of apprentices that court organist Christoph Kittel brought to the prayer and preaching services in 1647 to bolster the singing. See Schmidt, op. cit., p. 179.
25. Ibid., pp. 87-8.
32. Rifkin, op. cit., p. 10.
33. Ibid., p. 11.