

Disposition actuelle (1979) de l'orgue J.A. Silbermann

GRAND-ORGUE (49 notes C-c ³)	RÜCKPOSITIF (49 notes C-c ³)	ECHO (49 notes C-c ³)	PÉDALE (27 notes C-d ¹)
Bourdon 16'	Bourdon 8'	Salicional 8'	Soubasse 16'
Montre 8'	Prestant 4'	Bourdon 8'	Octavebasse 8'
Bourdon 8'	Flûte 4'	Prestant 4'	Quinte 5 1/3'
Prestant 4'	Nazard 2 2/3'	Flûte 4'	Prestant 4'
Nazard 2 2/3'	Doublette 2'	Doublette 2'	Bombarde 16'
Doublette 2'	Tierce 1 3/5'	Larigot 1 1/3'	Trompette 8'
Tierce 1 3/5'	Fourniture III	Flageolet 1'	Clairon 4'
Cornet V	Cromorne 8'	Cornet IV	
Fourniture IV		Cymbale III	
Cymbale III		Trompette 8'	
Trompette 8' B/D			
Clairon 4' B/D			
Voix Humaine 8'	Tremblant doux	Tremblant Echo	Tirasse GO/Ped
			Tirasse Echo/Ped
			Accouplements
			Pos/GO, Echo/GO

Diapason : A = 392 Hz

The historical J.A. Silbermann organ (1741)

The Silbermann family can be considered as the Stradivarius of organ building because of the quality and the particularly warm and brilliant sonority of their instruments.

Johann Andreas Silbermann was born in Strasbourg in 1712. He was 24 when he submitted a quote for a new organ for the Saint Thomas Church in 1736. The contract was signed in 1737.

He not only created the design of the admirable case of the instrument carved in oak by August Nahl the Elder (1710-1785), renowned artist (who also made some of the sculptures in the Sanssouci palace in Potsdam), but also the sliding panels of the upper part of the gallery (the lower part being of the late 17th century) which were created by a local artisan, Master Riediger, in 1737. The instrument was inaugurated in February 1741.

On his way back from Paris in the fall of 1778, Mozart stayed in Strasbourg for about three weeks. The date of his arrival there is not known; his first letter written in this town is dated October 15, 1778, the second was started October 26 and finished November 2, the day before his departure for Mannheim.

In Strasbourg Mozart played three piano concerts - October 17, 24 and 31 - at the *Poêle du Miroir*, meeting place of the Merchants' Guild, the current Mozart Hall, and the *Théâtre Français*, the current Opera House.

Mozart also performed, in the presence of J.A. Silbermann, in two organ concerts, as he wrote to his father on October 26:

"[...] As soon as they heard my name, the two, Herr Silbermann and Herr Hepp (organist), called on me, and also Kapellmeister Richter. [...] I played publicly on the two best organs that Silbermann has here, in the Lutheran New Church [today: Temple Neuf] and in the Thomas Church. [...]"

It is interesting to note that the Mausoleum of Marshal Moritz of Saxony, inaugurated in 1777, one year before Mozart visited St. Thomas, possibly inspired Mozart for the statue of the Commander in his opera *Don Giovanni*.

Having been romanticized in 1836 by Martin Wetzel, the organ was saved from further modernisation in 1908 by Albert Schweitzer who instead had it restored by Dalstein-Haerpfer. This firm had, in 1905, built the Choir organ in post-romantic style according to Schweitzer's specifications.

On July 28, 1909, at 9 pm, Schweitzer initiated the famous memorial concerts commemorating the death of J. S. Bach.

Towards the end of his life, Albert Schweitzer reminisces: *„How wonderful it was in 1893 when I played the instrument for the first time at the invitation of the good organist Adam. It still had the original sonorities of the time of Silbermann. Its third manual possessed great charm. Widor, upon hearing the old instrument, appreciated it immensely”* (letter from A. Schweitzer to André Stricker, 8th of August 1963).

In 1927 the tracker action of the organ was replaced by pneumatic action, and in 1956 the instrument was electrified. In 1979, Alfred Kern restored it to its original state under the auspices of the French Historic Monuments Department, with some technical adjustments in order to enlarge its repertorial capabilities.

Today, about half of the pipes and notably the façade pipes are Silbermann originals; in 1917, they were slotted to be recuperated as war material, but the German government authorized their safe keeping in order to keep the historic character of the instrument and because Silbermann was of “Germanic” origin. As a result, the St. Thomas organ can be considered as the best preserved among the 13 instruments in Strasbourg built by the Silbermann family.

Two interesting visual details: the central part of the Great organ and Ruckpositive cases respectively has three turrets, and the pipe in the centre of each towerlet in both cases has a rounded “Labium” or mouth shield whereas the other pipes have one in triangular form.

Although the instrument was originally built in the French style, it is also suitable for the music of J.S. Bach, not only because of the Saxon roots of the Silbermann family but due to the actual disposition of the pedal, which indicates polyphonic play.

One can still admire the original console of the instrument, on which keyboards Mozart actually played during his stay in Strasbourg 1778, exhibited in the nave of the church.

Bach in St. Thomas, Strasbourg

Amongst the instruments with which he was acquainted in Saxony, J.S. Bach played a number of organs built by Gottfried Silbermann. Gottfried (1683-1753) learnt his trade in Strasbourg alongside his brother Andreas (1678-1734), who had come from Saxony to settle in France, and who had worked for two years in Paris with the organ builder Fr. Thierry, in order to be better equipped to fulfill demands of the Alsatian clientele by supplying instruments according to the *„goût français“* („French taste“ or „- style“).

Gottfried returned to Saxony with his newly acquired knowledge, incorporating the style into his own personal one differing from that of his brother.

Johann Andreas Silbermann (1712-1783) inherited this dual French-German organ-building culture, which is exemplary in the instrument of St. Thomas, Strasbourg.

If the romantics considered Bach as a corner stone, representing at the same time a synthesis of masters of the past and a precursor of the future, then Bach's works served not only as an invaluable reference for any composer wishing to develop his art, but also as a redefinition of parameters in order to give musical composition a new dimension.

19th-Century Germany saw Bach as their „pater patriae musicae“: that is to say an exemplary figurehead, in a musical sense, for the German nation; an ideal to be followed.

In 1900 Albert Schweitzer recognized the importance of the organ of St. Thomas as a national monument, a historical legacy worthy of preservation, which could display the value of Bach's organ music to the full - at a time when Alsace was intent on reaffirming its identity connected to attributes of the past.

Certainly, figuratively speaking, St. Thomas, Leipzig was only a stone's throw away from St. Thomas, Strasbourg.

Furthermore, Moritz of Saxony, illegitimate son of August the Great - patron of J.S. Bach - is buried in the Pigalle Mausoleum at the front of the church, directly opposite the Silbermann organ.

The Johann Andreas Silbermann organ in St. Thomas is an elegant synthesis showing both French and German influence, and certainly in tune with the Alsatian identity, which lends to the music of Bach a nonsurplussed, singular and attractive dimension.

J.S. Bach

A man of profound spirituality, J.S. Bach dedicated his works: “Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam” or “Soli Deo Gloria” these works being at the same time intended for “the recreation - or delight of the soul”, without which music would be nothing but “idle chatter and diabolical noise” (Gründlicher Unterricht des General-Basses, 1738).

This fusion of heart and soul - two elements clearly inherent in Bach's works - are joined with a passion of unequalled profoundness of universal dimension. Does not the secret of Bach's art lie in a definition describing it as the union of skill and the natural with diligence and application?

In the creation of his art, Bach collected, summarized and combined all contributions of the past in order to create anew music composition of his own, but also simply for the creation of music per se.

And Bach, universal personality that he was, had understood that music - as well as all art worthy of its name - has a mission to fulfil, towards the human being who deliberately leaves his everyday life to converse with music itself. This mission is accomplished by allowing him to rise above himself, reaching directly to the heart through an intermediary of beauty. In other words: an intermediary of that which is One and which symbolizes the harmony towards which he aspires. In that Bach's music assumes timeless character, it is able to fulfil this mission universally for ever and ever.

The Works

Certainly one of the most famous works by J.S. Bach, the ***Tocatta and Fugue in D minor, BWV 565*** takes us by surprise with its timeless character and its original and provocative style; pre-romantic harmonies contrast with long passages of solo arpeggios in typical violinistic style.

It is even such that doubt arises as to the authenticity of the piece: whether it was written for the organ or by Bach at all.

It is however interesting to note the resemblance of the initial theme of the Tocatta to elements of the first fugue of the *Great Prelude in E minor* by Nikolaus Bruhns. Similarly, the first theme of Bach's *E flat Prelude and Fugue BWV 552*, as well as the subject of the *D minor Fugue BWV 539* (transcribed from the second movement of

the first *solo Violin Sonata BWV 1001*) show parallel elements: the violin fugue exhibiting the same compositional technique of arpeggiando divertimenti.

Concerning the double octaves, typical of harpsichord writing, in the Toccata, these are also to be found in Bach's orchestration of *Vivaldi's double violin concerto in BWV 593*.

Furthermore, the final modal cadence of the d minor fugue could also be questioned as to its authenticity, being too surprising and unique in the context of Bach's Oeuvre to have originated from his quill. We can find, however, similarities in another example: in the middle of the last movement of *BWV 1064, the Concerto in C for 3 harpsichords*.

In any case, the sequence passages, inspired by the North German Toccata, and further stylistic elements indicate that the composer had to have been acquainted with, as well as have mastered a large scope of stylistic parameters and compositional techniques from which a synthesis is created: the usage of rhetoric (where the initial theme of the Toccata is then embellished to become the subject of the fugue), dramatic declamatory style, and a seemingly endless variety of writing styles.

Considering all this, why shouldn't the composer be none other than J.S. Bach? Even given the fact that the autograph manuscript is lost, the oldest existing copy being attributed to J. Ringk (1717-1778), a pupil of Bach's.

Originally a slow Spanish folk dance, (*pasar una calle: „walk down a street“*) Bach's ***Passacaglia and Fugue in C minor, BWV 582*** develops this musical form to the epitome of its art. It is based on a ground bass (*basso ostinato*) in slow ternary time, followed by 20 variations of different style, written quasi in crescendo and converging in a monumental four part fugue. The theme is reminiscent of André Raison's *„Trio en passacaille (Messe du 2e ton)“* and *„Trio en chaconne (Messe du 6e ton)“* as well as of the Gregorian melody of the Communion for the 10th Sunday after Pentecost *„Acceptabis sacrificium justitiae“*.

It is quoted 21 times in the Passacaglia and is stated 12 times in the fugue, the fugue being a crowning innovative feature of this variation form of composition.

Along with its original French subtitle, the ***G major Fantasy (Pièce d'orgue), BWV 572*** could well be considered as a homage of Bach to France. Traditionally this piece has been interpreted as depicting the three stages of life. After a virtuoso one voice solo *„Très vite“*, follows a five voice counterpoint entitled *„Gravement“*, both played on the French *„Grand Jeu“* of the Ruckpositive and Great Organ respectively. The piece finishes with enigmatic arabesques in a *„Lentement“* movement in two voice composition, played on the Cornet of the positif accompanied by the Grand Jeu de Tierce in the pedal.

Transcription of famous works for the organ was common practice in Baroque times. The ***Concerto in A minor, BWV 593*** is a transcription of the well known *Concerto op.3 nr.8 for two violins* by Antonio Vivaldi. Not only does Bach transcribe the original score, but enriches the composition with additional contrapuntal elements.

Whereas in the first and last movements we can experience the brilliant sonority of the **Plein Jeu (mixtures)**, the central Adagio movement exhibits the magnificent vocal sound of the historic Silbermann pipes in the organ's facade along with the tremulant.

An early work of his youth, the **Prelude and Fugue in D major, BWV 532**, was probably composed after Bach's return from his stay at Lübeck. Following the prelude in tripartite form showing North-German, Italian and French influence, the brilliant fugue, based on a virtuose subject, develops in crescendo to culminate in a burst of fireworks.

J.S. Bach's **chorale preludes** can be considered as a musical showcase. In the same manner as important events in biblical history might be depicted in images for the illiterate common folk, Bach's chorale preludes represent a musical portrayal of the text of a hymn using figuralism to illustrate the emotional content and theological message for the listener.

The famous chorale „**Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme**“, **BWV 645**, is a transcription of the fourth piece in the Cantate of the same title, BWV 140, composed in 1731 for the 27th or 28th Sunday after Trinity, over the text „*Zion hears the sentries' summons*“. The dance-like theme, played by the violins and violas in unison, accompanies, along with the basso continuo, the tenor voices of the choir, who sing the cantus firmus.

"Hey, wake up!" the voice calls to us. / The guard up on the walls cries to us, / "Wake up, dear town, Jerusalem!" / Now in night's dark midnight hour / The watcher shrilly calls with power, / "Where are you, clever young women? / Wake up, the Bridegroom's near. / Pick up your lamps and cheer, / Hallelujah! / Get ready now, / The wedding's on. / You must go out and meet the groom.

*Zion hears the lookouts singing. / In every heart new joy is pounding. / All wake and hurry to get up. / Your Friend comes from heaven, glorious, / With Kindness, strong, with Truth victorious, / The day gets bright, God's Sun is up. / Now come, o worthy Crown,
Lord Jesus, God's own Son, / Good God save us! / You call us all / Into joy's hall / To celebrate the Holy Meal!*

Certainly one of the most beautiful chorale preludes Bach ever wrote, „**Liebster Jesu, wir sind hier**“, **BWV 731**, has a delicately ornamented chorale melody in the soprano line, which creates an atmosphere of simplicity, reassurance and serenity.

Blessed Jesus, at Thy word / We are gathered all to hear Thee; / Let our hearts and souls be stirred / Now to seek and love and fear Thee; / By Thy teachings sweet and holy / Drawn from earth to love Thee solely.

Probably performed at the inauguration of the organ at St. Blasii, Mühlhausen in 1709, „**Ein' feste Burg ist unser Gott**“ („*A solid fortress is our God*“), **BWV 720** - after Martin Luther's hymn text and melody, - the so-called „*Marseillaise of the Reformation*“ according to the German poet Heinrich Heine - is one of the rare examples of Bach's works having a reference to registration. In the manuscript of Johann Gottfried Walther - Bach's colleague and relative - „*Fagott*“ (bassoon) is written for the right hand and „*Sesquialtera*“ for the left. This indicates a German variation of the traditional „duo“, which is more orchestral in style than the typical „anche/cornet“ version which we find in the French Suite for organ.

The composition alternates between bicinium - written in two voices, typical of Bach's predecessors, and trio passages, where the musical figuralism suggests the pinnacles of a massive medieval fortress (the Divine Kingdom on Earth). The chorale melody is played alternately in the soprano (during the two-voice passages) and the bass (for the trio part) concluding in an allegorical crescendo.

A mighty fortress is our God, / A trusty shield and weapon; / He helps us free from every need / That has us now overtaken. / The old evil foe / Now means deadly woe; / Deep guile and great might / Are his dread arms in fight; / On earth is not his equal.

Written in the most unadorned fashion, „**Herzlich tut mich verlangen**“, **BWV 727**, is nevertheless one of the composer's most moving and expressive chorale preludes. The melody is that of the passion chorale „*O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden*“, which is habitually sung on Good Friday and which inspires us to meditate for a better world.

My heart is filled with longing / To pass away in peace; / For woes are round me thronging / And trials will not cease. / Oh fain would I be hastening, / From thee, dark world of gloom, / To gladness everlasting. / O Jesus! quickly come.

The Trio „**Herr Jesu Christ, dich zu uns wend**“, **BWV 655**, from the 18 Chorales of Leipzig, has two spirited upper voices in dialogue, accompanied by a bass, and is written in the typical style of a Trio Sonata. The contrapuntal motifs which confer to the piece its dynamic character, issue from the theme of the chorale. This is cited in long note values at the end of the work and accompanied by carillon-like motifs.

Lord Jesus Christ, be present now, / Our hearts in true devotion bow, / Thy Spirit send with grace divine, / And let Thy truth within us shine.

Already blind and on his death bed, J.S. Bach dictated to his student and son-in-law J.Ch. Altnikol his last composition „**Vor deinen Thron tret ich hiermit**“, **BWV 668**. It is based on the melody of „*Wenn wir in höchsten Nöthen sein*“, **BWV 641**. After each fugal introduction of the accompaniment voices, inspired by the motet style of Buxtehude, the chorale is cited in the soprano in a mode full of emotion.

According to the tradition initiated by Albert Schweitzer, this work is performed every year at the end of the Bach memorial concert on 28 July at St. Thomas. The public is explicitly requested to refrain from applause at the end of the piece in order to show respect at this moment of meditation. The St.Thomas titular organists' tradition requires that the chorale be played with the historical Silbermann stops.

Before Thy Throne I now appear, / O Lord! bow down Thy gracious Ear, / Reject not from Thy loving Face / A [poor sinner], who sues for Grace.

The artist

Daniel Maurer (organ) began the piano and organ at a very young age and acquired his First Prize in organ and diploma „*Licence en solfège*“ at the National School of Music of Mulhouse at the age of 17.

He continued his studies in Paris with Jean Langlais (who dedicated to Maurer his „*Noël n°3 avec variations*“), whom he regularly accompanied on concert tours as assistant and co-performer in concerts for four hands and four feet.

Further studies include master classes with Marie-Claire Alain and Guy Bovet

In 1982, he was awarded *First Prize with Honours* unanimously from the Jury of the International Competition (UFAM) in Paris, as well as the *First Prize of Organ* from the National Conservatory of Paris.

As a composer, Daniel Maurer has written works such as: „*The Scaling Symphony*“ for organ, „*4 Allegories*“ for flute, soprano and organ, a Christmas cantata: „*The Star of Peace*“ for soloists, children’s choir and organ, „*Melodies on poems of Paul Eluard*“ for soprano, flute and piano, and a transcription for organ of the „*Concerto for four harpsichords*“ of Bach-Vivaldi (Europart-Music Ed.).

Currently professor of organ at the National Conservatory of Strasbourg.

Guest professor at international Master Classes (for interpretation as well as for improvisation) and renowned soloist performer in numerous European countries and Japan.

Since 2004, titular organist of the historical Johann Andreas Silbermann organ (1741), St.Thomas Church, Strasbourg.